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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study describes a portfolio program in the teaching of English as a foreign language in two Finnish upper secondary schools. Approximately 100 students participated in the portfolio program, whose topic area was culture. First, the purpose of this action research was to try out and develop portfolios in foreign language teaching as a pedagogical innovation. Second, the aim was to foster students' empowerment, i.e., their active and responsible role in learning. The primary research questions were twofold: How did the portfolio program proceed and progress? and Did the portfolio program foster student empowerment? Different portfolio profiles and portraits emerged from the data collected. Findings suggest that a great majority of the students both liked the portfolio approach and took charge of their learning. Thus, the portfolios seemed to offer a vehicle for student empowerment. Some students, however, disliked the portfolio course, finding the topic area uninspiring and the student-centered and self-directed approach inefficient, difficult, or unsuitable for them. (Contains 6 figures, 2 tables, an approximately 250-item bibliography, and several appendixes.) (Author/NKA)

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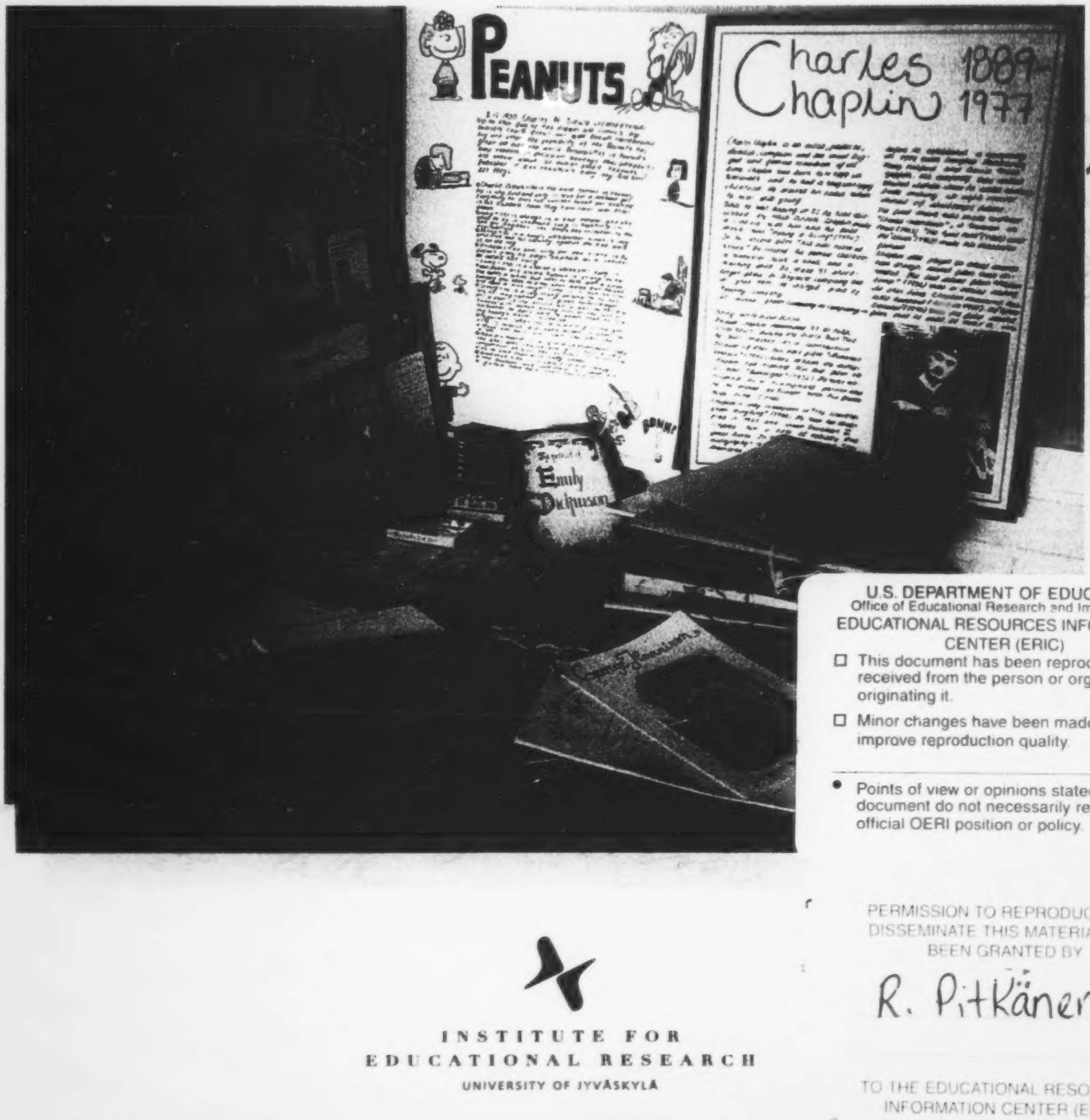
PIRJO POLLARI

ED 450 415

# "This is my portfolio"

## Portfolios in upper secondary school English studies



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# "THIS IS MY PORTFOLIO"

## PORTFOLIOS IN UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL ENGLISH STUDIES

# “THIS IS MY PORTFOLIO”

## PORTFOLIOS IN UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL ENGLISH STUDIES

Pirjo Pollari

INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH
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# Abstract

Pollari, P. 2000. "This is my portfolio". Portfolios in upper secondary school English studies. University of Jyväskylä. Institute for Educational Research. ISBN 951-39-0854-2

This qualitative case study describes a portfolio programme in the teaching of English as a foreign language in two Finnish upper secondary schools. Approximately 100 students participated in the portfolio programme, whose topic area was culture.

Firstly, the purpose of this action research was to try out and develop portfolios in foreign language teaching as a pedagogical innovation. Secondly, the aim was to foster students' empowerment, i.e. their active and responsible role in learning. Thus, the primary research interests were twofold: How did the portfolio programme proceed and progress? Did the portfolio programme foster the students' empowerment?

The present report is divided into three parts. Part I presents the theoretical framework, Part II describes and evaluates the process of the portfolio programme and Part III introduces and analyses different portfolio profiles and portraits emerging from the data.

The results were promising. A great majority of the students both liked the portfolio approach and took charge of their learning. Thus, the portfolio seemed to offer a vehicle for students' empowerment. However, there were also some students who disliked the portfolio course. They found the topic area uninspiring and the student-centred and self-directed approach inefficient, difficult or unsuitable for themselves.

Descriptors: portfolio, empowerment, foreign language teaching, qualitative case study

# Tiivistelmä

Pollari, P. 2000. "This is my portfolio". Portfolios in upper secondary school English studies. Jyväskylän yliopisto. Koulutuksen tutkimuslaitos. ISBN 951-39-0854-2

Tämän opetuskokeilun ja toimintatutkimuksen tavoitteet olivat kahtalaiset. Ensinnäkin tavoitteena oli sekä kokeilla että kehittää portfoliota opiskelu- ja arviointimenetelmänä lukion englannin kielen opetuksessa. Opetuskokeilun aikoihin (keväällä 1994) portfoliot olivat saavuttaneet melko laajaa suosiota varsinkin äidinkielen opetuksessa esim. Yhdysvalloissa, mutta vieraiden kielten opiskelussa portfoliokokeilut olivat vielä melko harvinaisia. Tämän tutkimuksen toisena tavoitteena oli, että oppilaat omaksuisivat aktiivisen, päätösvaltaisen ja vastuullisen roolin opinnoissaan ja myös kokisivat opiskelevansa itseään varten (ns. student empowerment).

Opetuskokeiluun osallistui neljä lukion toisen luokan opetusryhmää kahdesta jyväskyläläisestä lukiosta sekä heidän englannin opettajansa. Osallistuneita oppilaita oli noin sata ja opettajia kolme. Portfoliokokeilu toteutettiin ns. kulttuurikurssilla (EA6). Kurssin aikana opiskelu oli suurelta osin oppilaslähtöistä ja itseohjattua: muutamien yhteisten luokkatuntien lisäksi oppilaat tekivät valitsemistaan kulttuuriaiheista neljä tai viisi omaa työtä. Oppilaat päättivät itse myös töidensä toteutustavat samoin kuin oman työskentelytyylinsä ja aikataulunsa: oppilaat saivat mm. työskennellä sekä yksin, pareissa että pienryhmissä. Tekemistään töistä oppilaat myöhemmin valitsivat kaksi tai kolme arvioitavaa näytetyötä. Kurssiarvosana perustui portfoliotyöskentelyyn.

Portfoliokokeilun kahtalaisten tavoitteiden mukaisesti myös tämä tutkimusraportti on kaksijakoinen. Teoriaosuuden jälkeinen II osa esittelee opetuskokeilun hyvin konkreettisesti ja arvioi sen eri vaiheita, piirteitä, ongelmia ja antia. Osa III paneutuu erilaisten portfoliotapausten analyysiin varsinkin empowermentin näkökulmasta. Kaikkien oppilaiden portfoliot analysoitiin kvalitatiivisesti ensin ns. nelikenttään, jonka dimensioina olivat oppilaiden aktiivinen oppimisprosessin haltuunotto (learner empowerment) ja heidän näkemyksensä ja kokemuksensa portfolio-opiskelusta tällä kurssilla. Nelikenttäanalyysin avulla kaikkien tapausten joukosta kohosi erilaisia portfoliotyyppejä. Näitä erilaisia tyyppejä kuvaamaan valittiin kuusi portfoliotapausta, jotka samalla valottavat oppilaiden erilaisia portfolio- ja empowerment-prosesseja.

Portfoliokokeilun tulokset olivat lupaavia. Selkeä enemmistö oppilaista sekä omaksui aktiivisen ja vastuullisen oppijaroolin että myös piti roolistaan ja opiskelumenetelmästä. Suuri osa näistä oppilaista koki omaehtoisen englannin opiskelun hyvin kannustavana ja omaan aktiiviseen kielenkäyttöön rohkaisevana. Enemmistölle portfolio siis näytti tarjoavan välineen ‘empowermenttiin’. Joukossa oli toki myös oppilaita, jotka eivät pitäneet portfoliomenetelmästä ja tästä kurssista. Heidän mielestään kulttuuriaihepiiri ei ollut kiinnostava ja kurssin oppijalähtöinen ja itseohjautuva opiskelutapa oli tehotonta, vaikeaa tai heille itselleen sopimatonta.

Asiasanat: portfoliot, empowerment, kieltenopetus, kieltenopiskelu, kvalitatiivinen tutkimus, toimintatutkimus

# Acknowledgements

This publication is a slightly abridged version of my licenciate thesis which was accepted in February 1998 at the Department of English of the University of Jyväskylä under the name of *"This is my portfolio": Portfolios as a vehicle for students' empowerment in their upper secondary school English studies.*

Just as my licenciate thesis, this book would not exist without the help and support of numerous people to all of whom I am very grateful. First of all, if Professor Pirjo Linnakylä had not introduced me to the wonders of both portfolios and research by employing me as a researcher for the portfolio project at the Institute for Educational Research, I would not have done this study. Secondly, without Päivi Ahlroos, Mervi Eloranta and Pirjo Väänänen and their constant co-operation and support, I could not have done this study. Thirdly, without the students and their honest and vivid comments and reflections, this study could not – and should not – exist. Therefore, I want to dedicate this book to all the students who participated in the project.

The present report itself has also required help and inspiration from various people. For instance, the names of the portfolio portraits have all been inspired by different cultural products. Therefore, I would like to thank, for instance, the US Top 40, W. B. Yates, Jennifer Saunders and Joanna Lumley, Charles Dickens, Rob Reiner and Stephen King, Uriah Heep and Matt Groening for giving me the ideas for the portfolio portrait names.

Last but not least, there are numerous people, family and friends, colleagues and students, to whom I am greatly indebted for all their help, encouragement and, most of all, patience and understanding.

I thank you all.

# Prologue

> *This is my Portfolio, which includes four works. I have chosen two of them for my final grading. Music is very important to me but in this project I have tried to expand my perspective by making my works of the visual arts, music, literature and theatre.*
>
> *I have tried to make my languege ability better and I believe that I have been successful in this aim. However I hope that my mistakes in my works don't prevent you from understanding the contents.*

In modern educational discussion, empowerment is often seen as a central goal of education: students should become active and responsible agents who can take charge of their abilities, learning and, ultimately, of their lives. Therefore, in addition to enhancing students' knowledge and skills, education is required to foster students initiative, critical thinking, learning to learn as well as self-direction and responsibility. Furthermore, education should foster their self-concepts and self-esteem and, in consequence, their willingness and readiness to act actively and responsibly in order to take ownership of their potentials and of their lives.

In accordance, learning, also foreign language learning, is currently seen as a process of knowlegde and meaning construction based on the learners' own active participation and on their prior learning. Emphasizing the students' own active role in learning requires a paradigm shift from teacher- or textbook-centred transmission of knowledge to a more student-centred and self-directed approach as well as a shift from a basically quite uniform curriculum towards more individual curricula. The paradigm shift in learning and teaching also calls for more process-oriented and authentic assessment as well as students' self-assessment as part of the assessment procedures.

Could portfolios as a learning and assessment tool empower learners? Many portfolio reports, both foreign and Finnish, assure that portfolios offer a vehicle for individualizing teaching, learning and assessment and, as a result, make studying more personal and also more relevant. Furthermore, portfolios are reported to offer a tool for uncovering students' true potential. In consequence, in many countries portfolios have gained ground in the teaching of various subjects at all school levels from kindergarten to university. However, in foreign language education reported portfolio experiments are not yet very common.

Consequently, one of the initial ideas of this portfolio study was to try out portfolios in foreign language teaching as a pedagogical innovation. Could portfolios perhaps foster learner-centredness and students' active role in learning, which are emphasized in our new *Framework curriculum for the senior secondary school* (1994)? Many foreign experiments advocate portfolios as a vehicle for student empowerment – could portfolios promote learner empowerment also in Finnish foreign language education? Could portfolios based on the students' own choices of topics and working methods also foster students' 'lingual empowerment', their readiness and willingness to use the foreign language?

In accordance, this thesis describes a portfolio programme in the teaching of English as a foreign language in two Finnish upper secondary schools. The aim of the portfolio approach was to foster the learners' empowerment, their active and responsible role in learning. Furthermore, the portfolio course aimed at the learners' lingual empowerment, namely their readiness and willingness to use their skills of English actively.

The participating students, approximately 100 students, were in the second grade of the upper secondary school. Their teachers Mervi Eloranta, Päivi Ahlroos and Pirjo Väänänen took actively part both in the planning and in the carrying out of the programme. The portfolio innovation took place in the context of the sixth compulsory upper secondary school English course, namely the culture course. Therefore, the topic area of the portfolio programme was culture.

The present report itself is divided into three parts. Part I presents the theoretical and methodological framework of this study by discussing first portfolios as a learning and assessment tool in Chapter 1 and then, in Chapter 2, the concept of empowerment. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology of the present study.

Part II constitutes an illuminative evaluation of the portfolio programme. Hence, it both describes and evaluates the process of the portfolio programme. An accurate and even detailed account of what actually happened during the portfolio course can also be regarded as a necessary description of the method in this study. Finally, Part III attempts to depict and analyse different portfolio profiles and portraits emerging from the data.

In accordance with the dual nature of the present study as a case study consisting of both an illuminative evaluation of an innovation and a detailed analysis of different portfolio cases, the primary research interests are also twofold:

(1) How did the portfolio programme proceed and progress?
(2) Did the portfolio programme foster the students' empowerment?

# Part I

# The Theoretical and Methodological Framework

CHAPTER 1

# Portfolios as a tool for learning and assessment

## What is a portfolio?

In many fields, people have used portfolios as an amplified résumé – a portrait of the person, his or her skills, abilities, experience and interests – when seeking employment, for example (e.g. Purves et al. 1995a, 3). Some schools, art schools in particular, have used portfolios when selecting students but also when monitoring and assessing their studies. In recent years, portfolios have gained ground as an assessment method in ordinary schools as well.

Synthesizing various definitions, a portfolio in a school context can be defined as a systematic and purposeful selection of student work collected and selected by the student himself or herself. The portfolio exhibits the student's efforts, progress and achievements in one or more areas over a period of time. The portfolio often aims to show both the range and depth of the student's work. Usually the work also exhibits the student's own choice and interests. The portfolio should include a description of its purpose and goals as well as the student's self-assessment and its criteria. Preferably, the portfolio should contain the student's own reflection and evaluation with their rationale both on the selected work and on the process of working and learning. (See e.g. Cooper 1991a; Paulson et al. 1991; Tierney et al. 1991; De Fina 1992; Linnakylä 1993, 1994a; Pollari 1994a, 1995; Purves et al. 1995a.)

A portfolio is an individual and learner-centred tool for learning and assessment. Hence, there is no single model or pattern for it; instead, every teacher and class and even every individual student can create a portfolio that best suits their goals, purposes and contexts (Yancey 1992b, 108). However, any collection of student work is not automatically a portfolio (e.g. Jongsma 1989, Paulson et al. 1991; Purves et al. 1995a, 3–4). A portfolio is not necessarily a folder or a file either: a portfolio can be a computer disc (see e.g. Curtice 1991; Campbell 1992; Hetterscheidt et al. 1992), a video or audio tape, a box containing different kinds of art work and handicraft, or a combination of these all, for example. It is not the form that makes a collection of student work a portfolio (cf. Vavrus 1990, 50) but *the student's reflective process* in producing, collecting, selecting and assessing his or her own work (Linnakylä 1994a, 11): "Without the element of self-reflection, portfolio assessment cannot exist and the portfolio becomes just a notebook full of papers" (Gillespie et al. 1996, 488). Accordingly, the value of a portfolio is in the reflective process that deepens learning (Linnakylä 1993, 73; see also e.g. Camp 1992):

> The real value of a portfolio does not lie in its physical appearance, location, or organization; rather, it is in the mindset it instills in students and teachers (Valencia 1990, 340)

Paulson, Paulson and Meyer (1991, 63) explain the difference between a collection of student work and a portfolio as follows:

> A portfolio, then, is a portfolio when it provides a complex and comprehensive view of student performance in context. It is a portfolio when the student is a participant in, rather than object of, assessment. Above all, a portfolio is a portfolio when it provides a forum that encourages students to develop the abilities needed to become independent, self-directed learners.

The purpose and the function of a portfolio may vary, and so may its form and contents as well as the process of producing and compiling the portfolio. At first, the portfolio is often *a working portfolio,* also called a process portfolio (e.g. D'Aoust 1992) or a learning portfolio (Kohonen 1997, 15), which contains a variety of pieces of work with all their versions. The working portfolio thus documents the whole process of studying and learning.

Normally, students select some pieces of work that they consider the best or the most important ones at the end of a course or a term, for example. Students also assess the selected pieces and state their criteria for selection. *The final showcase portfolio* – which is sometimes also called a product portfolio (e.g. Kroeker 1991), a presentation portfolio (Purves et al. 1995a, 1995b), an assessment portfolio (e.g. Herter 1991; Stenmark 1991) or an exemplary portfolio (D'Aoust 1992) – contains the selected pieces of work with the self-assessments. Accordingly, it often represents the students' best work and thus shows the students' strengths. In some portfolio adaptations the criteria for selection has focussed on different aspects of student work, for instance, the range and versatility of student writing (*The portfolio primer* 1993; Pollari 1994c). Hence, the criteria for selection depend on the purpose of the portfolio.

## Portfolios and their functions

> The purposes for keeping a portfolio ultimately determine the form that the portfolio will take. (Wolf & Siu-Runyan 1996, 30.)

Portfolios have many definitions and, accordingly, also various purposes and functions (see e.g. Cooper 1991a, 1991b; cf. Valencia & Place 1994, 666). The purpose of the portfolio is nonetheless of central importance (e.g. D'Aoust 1992; De Fina 1992; Black 1993):

> Setting the overall purpose or purposes of portfolio assessment in your classroom should be one of the first major decisions you make because so much of what else you will do depends on what you decide. (De Fina 1992, 31.)

Portfolios may be used to document a process of learning and growth. The purpose of the portfolio may be, for instance, "to chronicle the growth of students" (Cooper 1991a, 7) or "to document the child's development through the portfolio process" (Cooper 1991a, 4). In many preschools and primary schools, in particular, portfolios have been used to document and show the pupils' growth, development and learning over a longer period of time (see e.g. Cooper 1991a; Clemmons et al. 1993; Kankaanranta 1994, 1996, 1998). A portfolio may also describe learning and development of older learners. For instance, portfolios have been used to document the professional growth of a teacher or a teacher trainee (e.g. Barton & Collins 1993; Kohonen 1994; Karjalainen et al. 1995; Norri 1995). Also, a proposal for a European Language Portfolio has been introduced in order to recognize, record and report European citizens' "language competence in a transnationally comprehensive way"(Schärer 1997, 450).

A portfolio may be used to show the learner's working process during some task or tasks: a portfolio may become a biography of work, which documents the whole work process from the first ideas to the final product through all its changes, material selections, trials and errors and revisions (see e.g. Cooper 1991b, 8; Taylor 1991, 1). Similarly, a portfolio may also chronicle a project from start to finish. Thus, the portfolio's function is to make the process more tangible and to develop a sense of process: students can see that a finished product is an outcome of a longer process of careful deliberation (see e.g. De Fina 1992, 32). Furthermore, the portfolio and its process can help students to see that learning and progress are due to their own work and effort, not chance or other external factors (e.g. Linnakylä 1994a; cf. Weiner 1974).

Portfolios are also used to exhibit and assess achievement and accomplishments. The purpose of a portfolio may be to showcase students' learning outcomes or their finest accomplishments, or to show a sample of the variety and scope of students' work. Such portfolios may be used as a basis for course grades or even diplomas. Furthermore, such portfolios may serve as an entrance tool for further education or training (see e.g. Cooper 1991b, 15; The portfolio path to admissions 1991). A portfolio may also serve as an amplified résumé when a person is seeking employment (e.g. Karjalainen et al. 1995; see also Schärer 1997): the potential employer can see in a more tangible way what the person has done and what his or her interests and strengths are.

In addition to documenting the process of learning and exhibiting and assessing the learning outcomes or accomplishments, portfolios may have other functions and meanings. Very often the purpose of a portfolio is to individualize instruction and assessment (see e.g. De Fina 1992, 32; Pollari 1994c, 140–142). Another central function for a portfolio approach may be to empower students to assume a more active and responsible role in their learning as well as to assume ownership of their work (e.g. Herter 1991; De Fina 1992, 32; Gillespie et al. 1996; Raines 1996; Wolf & Siu-Runyan 1996). Furthermore, a portfolio approach may be used to foster and create means for students' self-assessment (see e.g. Cooper 1991a; Raines 1996; Wolf & Siu-Runyan 1996). Also, portfolios may be used to foster co-operation, dialogue and conferencing between the teacher and students as well as among students (Luce-Kapler 1996; Gillespie et al. 1996):

> Portfolios can become locations to gather materials and around which people can gather. They are landscapes where teachers and students can explore and which they can describe together. (Luce-Kapler 1996, 49.)

Giving a fuller picture of a student and, especially, emphasizing his or her strengths, the portfolio may improve the student's self-concept as a learner and as a person (Hansen 1992; Gillespie et al. 1996). The portfolio can also be a vehicle for the student's self-expression. Furthermore, it can portray the learner as a whole person telling the teacher more thoroughly about his or her school work, learning processes and effort, for instance, but also about his or her ideas, interests and hobbies outside school. Thus, the portfolio may be a bridge between school and home: it can show parents what students actually do at school and how they progress (e.g. Milliken 1992; Linnakylä 1994a; Gillespie et al. 1996). Similarly, it can present a student to his or her new teacher or teachers in a more thorough and descriptive manner than the grades on a report card can and thus help transition to a new school or class (see e.g. Kankaanranta 1996, 1998). The portfolio may also provide teachers with feedback on their teaching, its emphases and practices (e.g. Herter 1991; Yancey 1992b; Raines 1996). A portfolio can be used in documenting and assessing a programme or curriculum as well (Linnakylä 1996a, 1996b; Wolf & Siu-Runyan 1996). The purpose of the portfolio may thus also be to foster a collaborative learning environment or to develop curricula and teaching and assessment practices, whether in a classroom context or for larger-scale purposes (see e.g. Cooper 1991a; De Fina 1992, 32–33; Simmons 1992).

Naturally, a portfolio may have several purposes simultaneously; furthermore, the functions and meanings may evolve and change as teachers and students and their needs and goals change (Pollari 1994a, 52).

As seen above, portfolios have some central functions, some of which are as follows (De Fina 1992, 31–33; see also Johnson 1991; Yancey 1992b; Linnakylä 1994a; Valencia & Place 1994; Linnakylä & Pollari 1997):

- To help students and teachers set individual goals and, thus, individualize teaching and learning as well as assessment
- To encourage students to take an active and responsible role in the learning process
- To empower students to develop a sense of ownership of their work
- To create means for students' self-assessment
- To provide authentic, real-life learning opportunities and entities
- To examine growth in some particular task or field over a period of time

- To develop a sense of process
- To align the curriculum, instruction and assessment
- To evaluate and develop the curriculum

Accordingly, portfolios offer students opportunities to direct their own work, learning and assessment, and thus they strengthen the students' sense of power, control and responsibility as well as their self-concepts and self-esteem (Linnakylä & Pollari 1997, 203–204). These notions go well together with socio-constructivist concepts of learning (see Figure 1, p. 26).

## Portfolios and modern concepts of learning

Education is often divided into two traditions or cultures of teaching: the traditional empiristic or behaviouristic view of learning with the teacher as a transmittor of knowledge and the student as a passive recipient; and the constructivist, experiential or transformative view of learning with the teacher as a facilitator and the student as an active agent of learning (see e.g. Rogers 1983, 18–21; Rauste-von Wright & von Wright 1994, 133–134; Rauste-von Wright 1997, 18–19). The following table by Kohonen (1992) presents the polar ends of some pedagogical dimensions that illuminate the paradigms and their different approaches (see Table 1). Naturally, classroom teaching is usually influenced by both paradigms and is thus somewhere between the polar ends (Kohonen 1994, 35–37).

Rogers summarizes the traditional empiristic or beharIouristic paradigm and its implications for teaching and learning in a somewhat provocative manner:

> When we put together in one scheme such elements as a *prescribed curriculum, similar assignments for all students, lecturing* as almost the only mode of instruction, *standard tests* by which all students are externally evaluated, and *instructor-chosen grades* as the measure of learning, then we can almost guarantee that meaningful learning will be at an absolute minimum. (Rogers 1983, 21; emphasis original.)

*Table 1.* *The paradigm shift in learning and teaching: the juxtaposition of the polar ends of some pedagogically relevant dimensions (Kohonen 1992, 81–82).*

| **Dimension:** | **Conservative model: behaviorism; transmission of knowledge** | **Experiential model: constructivism; transformation of knowledge** |
|---|---|---|
| **1. Power relation** | Emphasis on teacher's authority | Shared partnership, teacher as a "learner" |
| **2. Teacher's role** | Imparting knowledge (mainly frontal instruction); individual autonomy | Facilitating learning collaborative, interactive professionalism |
| **3. Learner's role** | Relatively passive recipient of information; individual work | Active participation, largely in cooperative teams; responsibility for one's own learning |
| **4. View of knowledge** | Knowledge presented as "certain"; application, problem-solving | Construction of personal knowledge in process; identification of problems |
| **5. View of curriculum** | Static; hierarchical grading of subject matter, predefined contents | Dynamic; looser organization of subject matter, including open parts and integration |
| **6. Learning experiences** | Knowledge of facts, concepts and skills; focus on content and product | Emphasis on process: learning skills, self-inquiry, social and communication skills |
| **7. Control of process** | Teacher in charge; structured learning | Learner in charge; self-directed learning |
| **8. Motivation** | Mainly extrinsic | Mainly intrinsic |
| **9. Evaluation** | Product-oriented: achievement testing; criterion-referencing (and norm-referencing) | Process-oriented: reflection of process, self-assessment; criterion-referencing |

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According to the constructivist view of learning, teaching should be flexible and it should emphasize the learners' capacities. Students should be active agents of their learning, not just passive receivers of information:

> To know something is not just to have received information but to have interpreted it and related it to other knowledge one already has. (Herman 1992, 75.)

Learning is a product of the learners' own actions and it is based on the learners' prior skills and knowlegde but also on their experiences and interests. Students' readiness to assume an active role in learning depends very much on their self-concepts and self-esteem: students' self-concepts play a vital role in whether students regard themselves as objects and recipients or as active agents in the learning process. Therefore, their self-concepts and self-esteem also play a major role in whether they have courage and willingness to try out their own hypotheses and to take an active role as well as whether they consider themselves responsible for their own learning (von Wright 1993).

Nevertheless, albeit learning is a product of the learners' own actions, action is not a pedagogical end in itself. In other words, the learners should assume an active role in learning, but their actions have to be a meaningful and purposeful part of a goal-oriented learning process in order to facilitate effective learning (Rauste-von Wright 1997, 20).

Effective and meaningful learning is thus *goal-oriented* and *self-regulated*: the student is committed to the goals and takes control over his or her learning in order to reach those goals. Learning tasks and contents should also be *ecologically relevant* for the learner: learners usually perceive things that relate to their reality and lives as meaningful and relevant challenges worth learning (e.g. von Wright 1993). If the learner has a say in defining the goals and deciding the content and methods, learning is usually more relevant to the learner and, thus, more effective (e.g. De Corte 1993). One of the premises of effective learning is that the learner attempts to understand "what he or she understands and knows about the matter to be learnt, and what he or she does not understand or know" since that understanding can guide the learner to seek relevant information (Rauste-von Wright & von Wright 1994, 124). Emphasis on the comprehension of different phenomena over the memorization of facts may also facilitate the transfer of learning into different contexts.

Metacognitive skills, learning to learn, can also be learnt and fostered (e.g. Rauste-von Wright & von Wright 1994, 130). In order to develop their metacognitive skills, students should plan, monitor and assess their own learning (De Corte 1993). As Lauren Resnick puts it:

> Just as knowledge is not a collection of separate facts, so learning competence is not a collection of separate skills. Learning competence does indeed involve having certain strategies, but more than anything it seems to involve knowing when to use them and – to put it simply – wanting to bother using them. (In Brandt 1988, 14.)

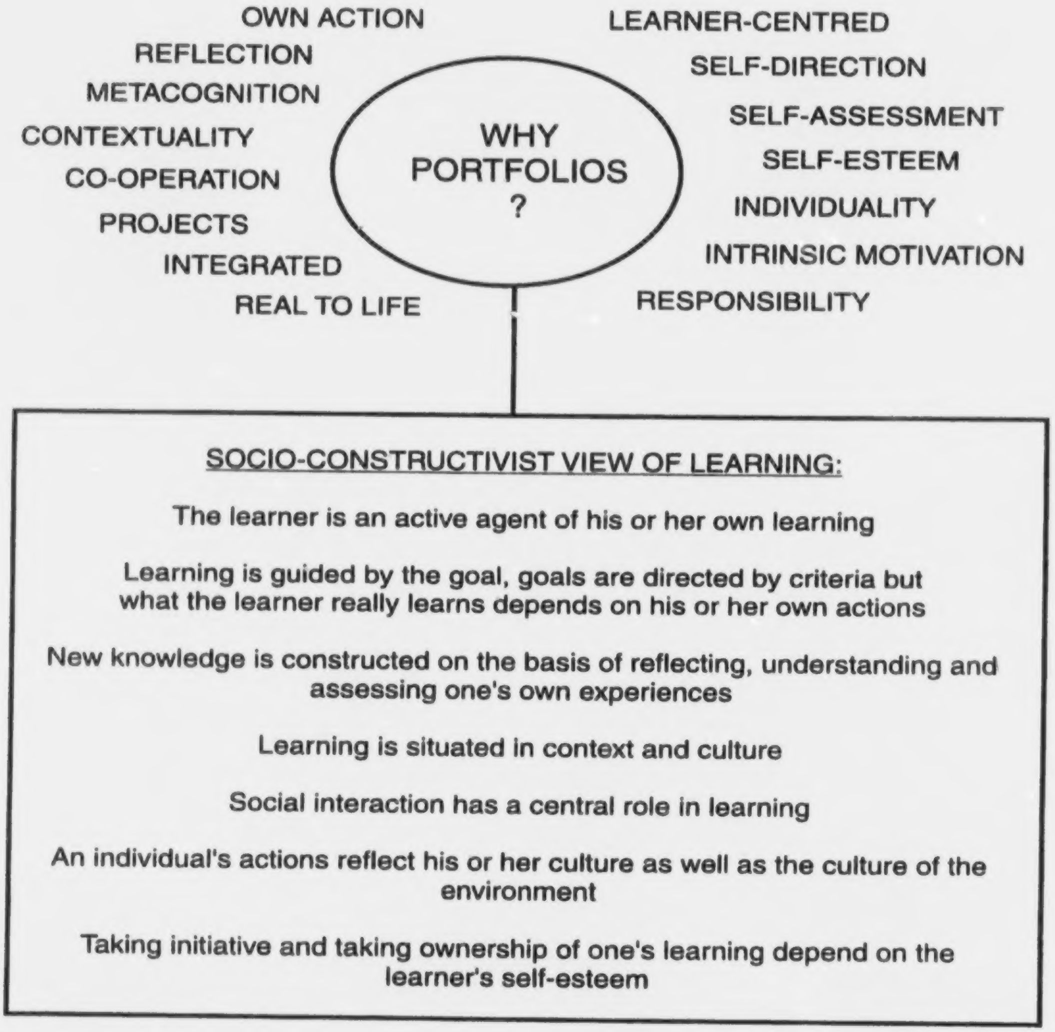
According to the socio-constructivist view of learning, learning is also *a situated and social process*. Learning is always situated in the context and culture where the knowledge and skills are learnt and used (Rauste-von Wright & von Wright 1994, 127). Therefore, learning should be anchored "in authentic, real-life social and physical contexts that are representative of the situations in which students will have to use their knowledge and skills afterwards" (De Corte 1993, 6). Learning is also a social process of interaction, negotiation and collaboration. Social interaction may facilitate learning by modelling effective thinking strategies and by providing scaffolding and mutual constructive feedback (Herman 1992, 75). Moreover, real-life problems often require co-operation and team-work (Herman 1992, 75). Consequently, social interaction, negotiation and collaboration as well as authentic learning tasks and contexts are all believed to be characteristics of effective learning. (See also e.g. Kohonen 1992; De Corte 1993; von Wright 1993; Linnakylä 1994a; Rauste-von Wright 1997, 17–19.)

All these notions of effective learning set high demands for both curricula and teaching. Curricula cannot be very strict or detailed if they are to allow individual goal-setting as well as to acknowledge the relativity and even rapid changes of information (e.g. Rauste-von Wright & von Wright 1994, 132–133). Also, the teacher should not be perceived as a transmittor of knowledge but as a facilitator and councellor of students' individual learning processes (e.g. von Wright 1996, 18–20; see also Hiemstra & Sisco 1990, 14–19):

> Learning is the making of connections between new information and the learner's existing network of knowledge – the construction of knowledge by the learner – and instruction should facilitate these connections. (Peterson et al. 1988, 43.)

Moreover, assessment should be multidimensional, based on various sources and methods, and it should focus on *what* and *how* as well as *for what purposes* students have learnt and understood the matters, not only on *how much* they have learnt (von Wright 1993; see also Kohonen 1997).

In consequence, the socio-constructivist view of learning provides a theoretical background for portfolios as a learning and assessment tool (see Figure 1).


OWN ACTION
REFLECTION
METACOGNITION
CONTEXTUALITY
CO-OPERATION
PROJECTS
INTEGRATED
REAL TO LIFE
WHY PORTFOLIOS ?
LEARNER-CENTRED
SELF-DIRECTION
SELF-ASSESSMENT
SELF-ESTEEM
INDIVIDUALITY
INTRINSIC MOTIVATION
RESPONSIBILITY

SOCIO-CONSTRUCTIVIST VIEW OF LEARNING:

The learner is an active agent of his or her own learning

Learning is guided by the goal, goals are directed by criteria but what the learner really learns depends on his or her own actions

New knowledge is constructed on the basis of reflecting, understanding and assessing one's own experiences

Learning is situated in context and culture

Social interaction has a central role in learning

An individual's actions reflect his or her culture as well as the culture of the environment

Taking initiative and taking ownership of one's learning depend on the learner's self-esteem

*Figure 1.* *Portfolios and their theoretical foundation in the socio-constructivist view of learning (Linnakylä 1994a, 13).*

## Portfolios as an assessment tool

> Good assessment is built on current theories of learning and cognition and grounded in views of what skills and capacities students will need for future success. To many, good assessment is also defined by what it is not: standard, traditional multiple-choice items. (Herman 1992, 75.)

Authentic and performance-based methods of assessment, and portfolio assessment as one form of them, have attracted many teachers and educators as an alternative for more traditional assessment and evaluation especially in the United States (e.g. *Student assessment* 1991; Black 1993; Freedman 1993; Herman et al. 1993). For many reasons, standardized and, in particular, multiple-choice tests have often been regarded as too narrow and, albeit cost-effective, not very powerful in telling the whole story of student performance (Shepard 1989; *Student assessment* 1991; see also Hebert 1992; Takala 1996; Kohonen 1997). Even though standardized tests are not nearly as usual in Finland as in the United States, some of the arguments still apply to Finnish assessment procedures.

Firstly, many forms of traditional assessment or evaluation, whether they are standardized, multiple-choice or teacher-made tests, take place after teaching and learning. Hence, tests usually focus on learning outcomes, not on the process of learning and working (cf. Valencia 1990, 338). Tests are also constrained to a given time and place: a student has one chance, an hour or two, for instance, at a given time to demonstrate all his or her knowledge or skills on the subject matter, no matter whether he or she feels tired, distressed or anxious (see e.g. Hamp-Lyons 1996; Kohonen 1997).

According to many studies, traditional testing, particularly standardized high-stake tests, can also have negative washback effects on the quality of teaching and learning by narrowing the instructional practice and also the curriculum (see e.g. Shepard 1989; Herman 1992, 74; Black 1993, 28; Shohamy 1997; see also Takala 1994, 3–4). In consequence, if tests focus on measuring fragmentary and decontextualized skills and knowledge, good success in a test does not guarantee that the student would understand the phenomena or the underlying concepts in real life (Shepard 1989):

> Insofar as standardized tests assess only part of the curriculum, many of these researchers conclude that time focused on test content has narrowed the curriculum by overemphasizing basic-skill subjects and neglecting higher-order thinking skills. - - In other words, superficial changes in instruction to improve test performance are not likely to result in meaningful learning. As a result, scores no longer represent broader student achievement, but only the content and formats included on the tests. (Herman 1992, 74–75.)

Traditional assessment has often been considered stating instead of being reflective. The teacher or the test-maker usually has more or less absolute power in deciding whether a student's answer is correct or not (e.g. Shohamy 1993). Students' interpretations, reasons and arguments for their answers, or their self-assessments have rarely been required or even acknowledged in more traditional forms of assessment (e.g. Shohamy 1993). Furthermore, tests and examinations usually allow little choice for the student: the questions to be answered and the topics to be discussed may have some options, but generally not many. Assessment methods as well as assessment criteria are also usually decided by teachers, administrators or test-makers, not by students (e.g. Shohamy 1993; von Wright 1993). Thus, students' opportunities to show learning are rather limited. From a student's perspective, assessment methods or test tasks may also lack relevance and meaningfulness (see e.g. von Wright 1993). As a result, students often remain somewhat disempowered objects of assessment instead of being actives participant in a negotiated process of evaluation (cf. Paulson et al. 1991, 63).

Another feature that traditional assessment methods have been criticized for is that they easily discourage students. Attention is often paid only to the matters students did not know, not to the matters they did know. Moreover, mistakes are usually seen as weaknesses and faults, not as opportunities for learning. For instance, standardized tests often give "judgement without suggestions for improvement" (Kohonen 1997, 14). Accordingly, such assessment often fails to encourage students and thus enhance their learning. Moreover, because tests and examinations impose ideas and criteria of ability, they may have high-stake consequences as indicators of an individual's success or failure and may even determine the individual's future, for instance his or her chances for further studies or employment (Shohamy 1993, 1997):

> How we assess can support careers and make people successful, but it can also destroy people's careers, place unfair burden on individuals' self perception and unnecessary hurdles in the path of their achievement. (Noam 1996, as quoted by Shohamy 1997, 1–2.)

In consequence, assessment does not necessarily foster learning but may merely evaluate some of its outcomes, and sometimes in a rather dubious way. Therefore, convinced that "no single test, single observation, or single piece of student work could possibly capture the authentic, continuous, multi-dimensional, interactive requirement of sound assessment" (Valencia 1990, 339), educators have explored alternative forms of assessment for "wedding process to product and assessment to learning" (Johnson 1991, 2). Furthermore, according to current views of learning, the criteria for learning should emphasize students' critical thinking, self-reflection, problem-solving skills and understanding as well as their ability to transfer knowledge and skills into new situations (Calfee & Perfumo 1993, 532; Linnakylä 1994a, 9–10; von Wright 1996, 19). These features should be focussed on also in the assessment of learning. Thus, authentic assessment methods and tasks should meet the following requirements (see Linnakylä 1994a, 9–10; see also Takala 1997; cf. Wiggins 1989, 45; Kohonen 1997, 17–18):

- to put more emphasis on students' own production rather than simply answering preset questions
- to assess the skills and abilities in contexts that are close to real-life contexts and situations in which those skills and abilities are needed
- to be an integral part of learning: in addition to learning outcomes, the assessment tasks should pay attention to learning processes and strategies
- to address and emphasize self-assessment, critical thinking, problem solving as well as application and transfer of knowledge
- to seek to show the quality and strengths rather than the quantity and weaknesses of students' learning.

Portfolios, among some other forms of authentic and performance-based assessment, are believed to offer solutions to many of these problems:

> Portfolios represent a philosophy that demands that we view assessment as an integral part of our instruction, providing a process for teachers and students to use to guide learning. It is an expanded definition of assessment in which a wide variety of indicators of learning are gathered across many situations before, during, and after instruction. It is a philosophy that honors both the process and the products of learning as well as the active participation of the teacher and the students in their own evaluation and growth. (Valencia 1990, 340.)

Portfolio assessment may have many good qualities but it is not a panacea and it certainly is not unproblematic. First of all, defining the purpose and the framework of the portfolio may prove difficult: what to include in the portfolio, who decides on its contents and criteria, and how will the work be assessed and by whom (Freedman 1993, 38)?

> Portfolios are not MAGIC. Just because students put their work in a manila folder or onto tapes, there is no guarantee that the assessment that follows is wise or helpful. The assignments could be lockstep. Students could be asked to fill out worksheets on reflection. The portfolio could end up containing a chronological sample of short answer tests. Scoring might be nothing more than individual teachers counting up assignments or taking off points for using the wrong kind of paper. (Wolf 1989b, 1, as quoted by Freedman 1993, 40.)

Portfolio assessment also tends to be time-consuming demanding a great deal of time and work from both the teacher and the students. Hence, portfolios have been feared to be too costly: particularly for large-scale purposes, portfolios have often been considered less cost-effective than multiple-choice tests (e.g. Maeroff 1991; O'Neil 1992, 16–18).

Accordingly, a number of writers consider portfolios a beneficial complementary tool for formative classroom-based assessment that aims at supporting instruction but not suitable or rigorous enough for more high-stake assessment, for instance for accountability or certification purposes (e.g. Herman et al. 1993; Messick 1994; see also Purves 1993). First of all, the reliability and validity of portfolio assessment have often been doubted (e.g. Herman et al. 1993; Messick 1994; Hamp-Lyons 1996; cf. Simmons 1992). Many earlier studies show that inter-rater reliability and also task reliability in scoring portfolios may drop unacceptably low (Linn 1994, 10; Moss 1994, 6). However, some studies indicate that adequate inter-rater reliability may be achieved through rater training and well-defined scoring rubrics (see e.g. Freedman 1993; Linn 1994, 10; Linnakylä 1996b). In addition, both the holistic and analytic methods of scoring portfolios have raised concerns. Some studies suggest that portfolios rated as a whole tend to obtain higher scores than portfolios whose score is the average of the ratings of each piece of work included in the portfolio (Herman et al. 1993). Therefore, holistically scored portfolios seem to be biased for the best. In some studies, analytically and separately scored portfolio pieces have also showed higher inter-rater reliability than holistically scored portfolios (see e.g. Moss 1994). Yet, many proponents of portfolio assessment tend to advocate holistic scoring. That raises an interesting question of the purpose of the assessment: should the raters be looking for students' capability and potential, or their typical or average performance?

Accordingly, the reliability across tasks and, hence, the generalizability of portfolio results have also caused concern (O'Neil 1992; Linn 1994; Messick 1994; Moss 1994). For instance, if the portfolio exhibits the student's best work only, does it give a realistic and comprehensive picture of the student's abilities? Some studies suggest that students' portfolio scores are often higher than their test scores (Herman et al. 1993). Do the differences between portfolio and test scores indicate that standardized tasks fail to capture some students' real capacity and that these students perform better when allowed more time and more authentic, contextualized and meaningful tasks as well as more encouragement and help; or do the inconsistencies show that portfolio scores overestimate some students' knowledge and skills (Herman et al. 1993, 219–220)? Furthermore, if students are allowed a great deal of freedom in designing their portfolios and in defining the criteria, how can it be ensured that portfolios provide enough relevant information for valid assessment? Consequently, Messick (1994) fears for possible *construct underpresentation*, i.e. the assessment method fails to tap all the skills and knowledge being assessed. He also considers the possibility of *construct-irrelevant variance* a threat to the validity of performance assessment methods:

> With respect to distortion of task performance, some aspects of the task may require skills or other attributes having nothing to do with the focal constructs in question, so that deficiencies in the construct-irrelevant skills might prevent some students from demonstrating the focal competencies. With respect to distortion of scoring, construct-irrelevant variance can bias subjective judgments of performance, as when scores on essay tests are influenced by unrelated skills, for example, quality of handwriting on essay tests of the persuasiveness of arguments, or English-composition skills on tests of knowledge of biology concepts. (Messick 1994, 16.)

Authenticity, directness and contextualization, the importance of which the proponents of performance assessment emphasize (see e.g. Wiggins 1989, 1992), have also been called into question (Messick 1994). Are portfolios authentic to the curriculum, school work or life (Messick 1994, 18)? If teachers, peers or parents help students produce or improve their work, are portfolios then authentic student work (see e.g. Freedman 1993, 47; Herman et al. 1993, 220–221)? Concerning the importance of contextualization and directness of assessment tasks, Messick (1994, 18) maintains that also "the assessment of component skills serves important pedagogical purposes" and that decontextualized tasks may prove useful in tapping and fostering students' abstraction skills. Furthermore, richly contextualized assessment tasks are not uniformly good for all students:

> Indeed, contextual features that engage and motivate one student and facilitate his or her effective task performance may alienate and confuse another student and bias or distort task performance. (Messick 1994, 19.)

In addition, both for classroom and large-scale assessment purposes, the comparability of individual student portfolios and their grades have been questioned (see e.g. Maeroff 1991; Herman et al. 1993; Messick 1994; Hamp-Lyons 1996; cf. also Moss 1994). In other words, "are portfolio scores meaningful indicators of student achievement?" (Herman et al. 1993, 202) :

> What should be in the portfolios? What should students be asked about the contents of their portfolios? How can some element of standardization be lent to the process so that one student's portfolio may be compared with another's? Putting less emphasis on comparisons is fine, but at some point a child and his parents have a right to know whether the child's progress is reasonable for his or her age and experience. (Maeroff 1991, 276.)

Another question related to the assessment of portfolios is who should assess or grade portfolios. When the final grade is being given, should the students' own evaluations and suggestions for the grade be taken into account, or could their evaluations distort the objectivity of the grade? Maeroff (1991, 280), among others, raises the question whether even teachers are qualified and capable enough to assess and grade portfolios, especially when portfolios are used for high-stake purposes, because many teacher training programmes require and provide insufficient or no training at all in assessment as a part of teacher certification.

Accordingly, using portfolios as an assessment tool may raise plenty of both practical and theoretical concerns. Portfolios can also be abused. Because portfolios are, and should be, highly contextualized, using portfolio frameworks designed for entirely different contexts and purposes or using ready-made models of portfolios can distort the purpose of assessment. Furthermore, portfolios being an attractive buzzword at the moment, some educators may feel tempted to name or rename their assessment practices a portfolio whether they have any true foundation in, say, learner-centredness and self-assessment or not. The name of a portfolio or the form of a folder do not, naturally, change the actual assessment process and its meaning.

However, one of the advantages of portfolios is that they can provide a tool for various levels of assessment, both formative, summative and predictive:

> Creating a portfolio is a form of formative evaluation; the portfolio itself, on the other hand, serves as a summative evaluation. (Purves et al. 1995b, 6.)

Even one and the same portfolio may serve as a vehicle for many different forms and levels of assessment such as *process assessment* that both reflects and supports the working process, *peer-assessment, reflective self-assessment, summative performance assessment* and *external assessment* (see Figure 2). Thus, assessment is integrated and aligned with learning and studying instead of only intersecting them occasionally. Hence, students have various opportunities to show their learning, and assessment is based on a variety of actual, authentic classroom learning activities (Valencia 1990).

In addition to giving students various opportunities to demonstrate their learning and abilities, portfolio assessment also allows students a great deal of latitude in choosing their learning and assessment tasks. Although perhaps problematic from the point of view of the psychometric concepts of reliability and validity, student choice can also be seen as an advantage of portfolio assessment. At least to some extent, students' own choice in choosing their topics and in selecting their pieces for the final assessment balances the unequal power relations of a traditional test-maker and test-taker (cf. e.g. Shohamy 1997). When students can choose what to include in their final portfolios, they can also experiment and take risks with some of their work (Gitomer 1991; Murdick 1991; Gold 1992): since not every piece of work has to succeed, and furthermore, since evaluation is not based solely on the success of a final product, "students are more willing to explore different avenues" (Gitomer 1991, 12). Experimentation and risk-taking are considered important in fostering students' further learning (e.g. Glazer & Brown 1993, 12–13; cf. Vygotsky 1982, 184–186).

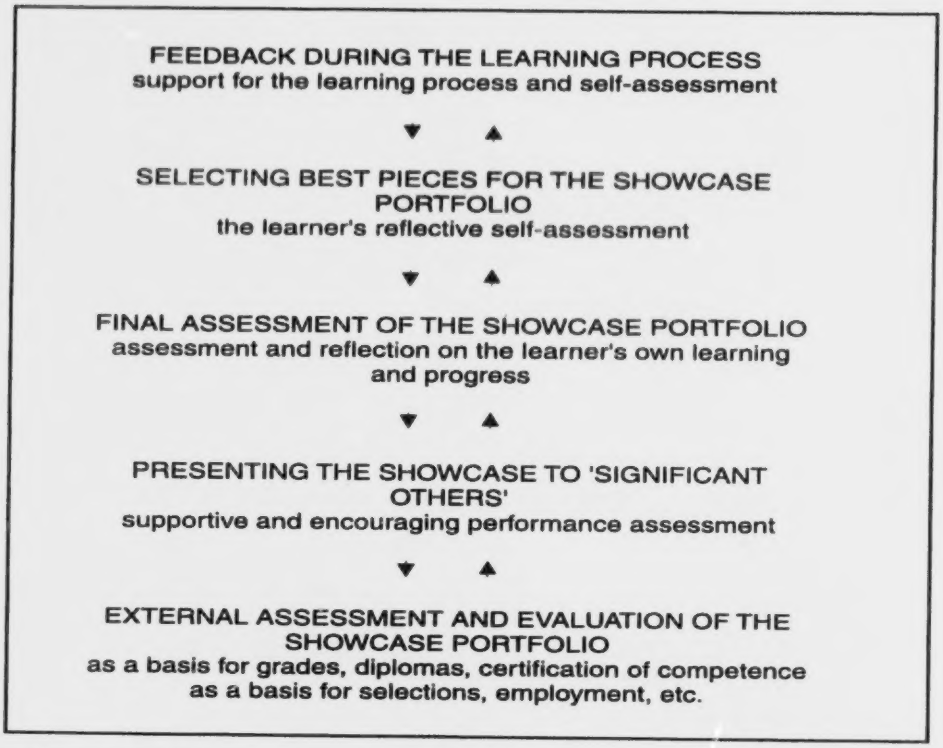

FEEDBACK DURING THE LEARNING PROCESS
support for the learning process and self-assessment
▼ ▲
SELECTING BEST PIECES FOR THE SHOWCASE PORTFOLIO
the learner's reflective self-assessment
▼ ▲
FINAL ASSESSMENT OF THE SHOWCASE PORTFOLIO
assessment and reflection on the learner's own learning and progress
▼ ▲
PRESENTING THE SHOWCASE TO 'SIGNIFICANT OTHERS'
supportive and encouraging performance assessment
▼ ▲
EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION OF THE SHOWCASE PORTFOLIO
as a basis for grades, diplomas, certification of competence
as a basis for selections, employment, etc.

*Figure 2.* *Portfolio assessment and its multiple opportunities and levels (adapted from Linnakylä 1994a, 25).*

Student choice also both requires and fosters students' reflective self-assessment on their own work, its processes and products (e.g. Rief 1990; Herter 1991; Cooper & Brown 1992; cf. Ballard 1992). Furthermore, students can express what they consider important, valuable and interesting through their own assessment criteria in their rationales (e.g. Rief 1990; Frazier & Paulson 1992; Linnakylä 1994a, 1996a). Thus, students' own choices and criteria also promote dialogue between the teacher and the student (Moss 1994, 9) as well as among the students. Therefore, student choice empowers students to become active and reflective participants in the negotiated process of assessment. In other words, it allows students their own voices also in assessment:

> From a psychometric perspective, the call for "detached and impartial" high-stakes assessment reflects a profound concern for fairness to individual students and protection of stakeholders' interests by providing accurate information. From a hermeneutic perspective, however, it can be criticized as arbitrarily authoritarian and counterproductive, because it silences the voices of those who are most knowledgeable about the context and most directly affected by the results. (Moss 1994, 9–10.)

## The portfolio process in the classroom

As discussed above, setting the purpose of the portfolio approach is of vital importance since the purpose should guide other decisions concerning the portfolio outline. Furthermore, students should know from the start what they are expected to do, and how, why and for what purpose (e.g. Barton & Collins 1993). Therefore, discussion and negotiation concerning the overall purpose, goals and framework of the portfolio approach as well as students' individual goals and tasks is the first phase when portfolios are introduced to a class. Moreover, assessment criteria should be discussed and agreed on since the students should know from the beginning how their work will be assessed (e.g. Maeroff 1991; Barton & Collins 1993).

The work that students produce and compile in their working portfolios may include individual work, pair and group work as well as larger projects, for example. The degree of students' choice in defining their own goals and tasks may vary quite considerably. In some portfolio programmes students have had a great deal of freedom and choice, whereas in some other programmes all students have had the same tasks. Generally, the teacher has given a 'menu' of tasks or topics to choose from. However, even if the tasks are more structured, students' choices should be appreciated, and difference and individuality encouraged in their work (e.g. Linnakylä 1994a, 15).

The degree of freedom given to students is often said to depend on students' familiarity with, and readiness for, self-direction and independent decision-making. However, even in one and the same group, students' readiness and willingness to assume responsibility and independence may vary considerably. Thus, the release of responsibility may be a complex matter requiring a great deal of both general and individual negotiation, guidance and scaffolding:

> Portfolios do not engender independence and responsibility automatically. Responsibility for learning is a skill to be learned just as any other skill. (Moje et al. 1994, 290.)

In some experiments, the entire working portfolio without any selection has been submitted to the teacher for evaluation as evidence of all work done during the course (see e.g. Kauppinen et al. 1994). However, if the student does not assess any of the pieces himself or herself either, the 'portfolio' remains little more than a collection of student work (Paulson et al. 1991; Gillespie et al. 1996). Naturally, the work file may broaden assessment also as such, and it can serve as a starting point for a portfolio containing students' selection and self-assessment.

Self-assessment and reflection as well as collaborative assessment are an essential part of the portfolio process (Yancey 1992a, 16). Students are often asked to keep a log to monitor and reflect on their work processes. Class conferences where students review each other's work in small groups are part of many portfolio adaptations. Peer and self-assessment have often proved difficult and, thus, students may need some support in the assessment. In some portfolio programmes students have filled in checklists, questionnaires or self-assessment sheets (see e.g. De Fina 1992; Clemmons et al. 1993). However, a less restricted set of questions that students can use as a starting point and guide may scaffold and deepen students' self-reflection. Questions aiming at scaffolding and deepening self-reflection may also be helpful in guiding peer feedback. Such questions may be, for instance (see e.g. White & Arndt 1991; Camp 1992; Linnakylä 1994a):

> What was the best or most interesting feature of the piece?
> Did the piece raise any questions in your mind?
> Would you like to know more about something?
> What did you learn from it?
> How could the piece still be improved?

During the working process the teacher also gives feedback on work in progress. With the assistance of peer and teacher feedback students can improve their work. A final piece of work thus becomes a product of a longer process of work, feedback and revision.

At the end of a course or term, for instance, students select some of their working portfolio pieces for the showcase portfolios. In some experiments, the portfolio approach is introduced to the students at that point: students gather the work they have produced earlier as part of their ordinary school work and then, on the basis of the agreed purpose and criteria, select some pieces for assessment (see e.g. Tikkanen 1996). Usually students are advised to select the pieces that they consider the best, the most important or personally the most relevant ones.

The criteria for selection depend on the purpose of the portfolio: if the purpose is to exhibit the variety of student writing, then students are asked to select pieces of different genres, functions and tones (e.g. D'Aoust 1992). Some final portfolios have showcased the student's best and most important pieces but also a piece of work which the student has not been satisfied with, or a process piece that illustrates the whole writing process from the first draft to the finished piece (see e.g. Howard 1990; Camp 1992; Pollari 1994c, 146). For instance, in a Finnish primary school experiment, pupils were asked to choose four pieces of work from each chosen subject: the best, the nicest to do, the most difficult one and the one that taught the most (Saukkola 1996). In addition to selecting the pieces, students also assess them and give their own criteria for the selection. However, selection and self-assessment may need scaffolding. Questions helping reflection and self-assessment may be, for instance, as follows (see e.g. Rief 1990; Camp 1992; Linnakylä 1993, 1994a, 21–22):

> Which piece or pieces do you consider your best? Why?
> Why did you select this piece or these pieces?
> What was most important or interesting in it or them?
> What was especially important or interesting to you when working on this or these pieces?
> What did you learn from it or them?
> Did you have any problems? How did you solve them?
> How could you still have improved your work?
> What kind of tasks, working methods or topics interested you most? Which were the easiest to you? Which were the most difficult ones? Why?
> What kind of feedback did you get?
> What did you learn from it?
> What did you learn from other students' work?
> How has your work changed?
> What would you like to do next?

The selection is considered important because it 'forces' the students to assess their work: if students are given the freedom but also the responsibility to choose some of their pieces of work, knowing that the selected pieces will serve as the tool for their assessment, the students will probably take the task seriously and engage into the assessment and also state their criteria. The selection and self-assessment processes are believed to help students to see the versatility of their work and learning and the processes and strategies that they use; furthermore, selection and self-assessment are also believed to help students to acknowledge their own strengths and needs, to assume responsibility and ownership for their own work and progress, and to set new goals for learning (e.g. Tierney et al. 1991; Camp 1992, 64–65; Linnakylä 1994a, 19). If students submit everything to the teacher or if the teacher selects the final work, students' reflection may remain very superficial (e.g. D'Aoust 1992, 43). Cooper and Brown (1992, 43) summarize the importance of selection as follows:

> Selecting their best writing allows students to evaluate their own work while the rationale asks them to internalize their own standards to support that choice in writing.

In addition to assessing each chosen piece of work, students are often asked to reflect on and write a summative assessment of their work and learning during the whole portfolio programme (e.g. Gold 1992).

In classroom practice, students often present their final portfolios to their classmates in a '*portfolio celebration*'. A portfolio celebration offers a forum for both supportive assessment and social learning: students get feedback and encouragement from their peers and, at the same time, seeing the totality of different work produced in the group, they learn from their peers and their work. Sometimes portfolios may be exhibited on school theme days or in parents' meetings. In some cases parent-teacher discussions on pupils' progress have become occasions for the pupils themselves to exhibit their portfolios to the parents and thus show their learning (Tikkanen 1996): the assessment discussion becomes a dialogue where the student is an active participant, not only an object being assessed.

Finally, showcase portfolios are usually given to the teacher for evaluation. Many writers and teachers advocate holistic scoring, giving an overall grade for the whole portfolio:

> In reviewing a portfolio our goal is not to mark and grade individual products but to appraise the whole set as indicators of where the student is as a learner and thinker. (DeFabio 1993, 2.)

Sometimes, however, pieces are assessed separately. Usually scoring is based on descriptive rubrics or dimensions of quality (see e.g. Purves et al. 1995b) and is thus more qualitative than quantitative; nevertheless, sometimes assessment is based on rather quantitative check lists and scoring systems (see e.g. Stahle & Mitchell 1993). In many experiments the teacher has also given a narrative assessment of the portfolio. Thus, the teacher has been able to give more comprehensive feedback on the student's work and progress focussing on the strengths of the portfolio but also helping the student to pay attention to areas which need improvement. Sometimes students themselves have suggested a grade for their portfolios and then, considering the students' self-assessments and rationales, either the teacher or an external evaluator has decided on the final grade (see e.g. D'Aoust 1992; Pollari 1994c). Especially when portfolios are used for large-scale assessment, they are usually evaluated by an external rater or by a group of raters to establish reliability of scoring (cf. Linnakylä 1996b).

After the final grading or assessment the portfolio is usually returned to its owner, the student. The student may pass the showcase portfolio along to the next teacher, for instance, as a continuous document of his or her learning and growth from year to year (Wolf 1989a, 37) or keep it as a 'souvenir' of his or her school work and learning (see e.g. Torppa 1996). The final portfolio may also serve as a basis for building a new portfolio for a different purpose: for instance, a teacher training portfolio may offer material for a portfolio used for seeking employment as a teacher as well as a vehicle for monitoring and developing one's professional growth (e.g. Eloranta 1996).

## Portfolios in various subjects and at different school levels

Portfolios have gained ground in various countries but especially in the United States. In the United States, portfolios have been used mainly in the teaching of *English* as the mother tongue at various school levels (see e.g. Rief 1990; Valencia 1990; Cooper & Brown 1992; Frazier & Paulson 1992; Hansen 1992; Yancey 1992a; Valencia & Place 1994). Furthermore, portfolios have been used in *visual arts* (see e.g. Taylor 1991; Winner 1991; Winner & Simmons 1992), *music* (e.g. Winner et al. 1992), *mathematics* (see e.g. Stenmark 1991; Knight 1992; Crowley 1993; Kuhs 1994), *science* (see e.g. The Portfolio Primer 1993; Linnakylä 1994b) and *social studies*. Portfolios have also been introduced to the teaching of English as a second language (see e.g. Fu 1992; Gottlieb 1995, 1997; McNamara & Deane 1995; Smolen et al. 1995; Hamp-Lyons 1996). However, especially if compared to the popularity of portfolios in mother tongue education, documented portfolio experiments still appear to be relatively rare in foreign language education[1] (Padilla et al. 1996, 430).

In Finland, even though portfolios at school are relatively new, there have been quite a few portfolio projects in various subjects and at different school levels. For example, at the preschool and primary school level portfolios have been used in documenting and assessing children's growth and learning in order to develop the children's self-concept, and also in order to implement their own curricula (Kankaanranta 1994, 1996, 1998). Furthermore, at the primary school level portfolios have been used to let pupils have a more central role in their assessment (Tikkanen 1996), to promote their self-assessment (Saukkola 1996), and to encourage and foster pupils' reading interests, skills and habits (Kovanen 1996).

In addition to using portfolios in the teaching of different subjects, for instance, the mother tongue (Blom 1996), mathematics (Kupari & Saranen 1996) and the arts (Grönholm 1996), portfolios have also been experimented with as a vehicle for external assessment of writing in mother tongue education (Linnakylä 1996a, 1996b). Some comprehensive school classes have also produced project portfolios integrating many subjects on a particular topic (see Ikäheimo 1994; Vatanen 1994). In the upper secondary school, portfolios have gained ground in various forms in the teaching of many different subjects, for instance Finnish, journalism, history, philosophy, religious education and health education (Kivelä 1996). Portfolios have been experimented with also in foreign language education in the upper secondary school (see e.g. Kauppinen et al. 1994a; Pollari 1994b, 1996; Kivelä 1996; Mäkinen 1996).

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[1] Although many writers do not differentiate between the concepts of *second language* and *foreign language* but use second language to refer to any language learnt after the mother tongue or the first language, a distinction is here made between the two. Therefore, in this thesis a second language denotes the language that is not the learner's mother tongue but that is learnt or acquired, either formally or informally, "in a location where that language is typically used as the main vehicle of everyday communication for most people" in that community (Oxford et al. 1996, 8). A foreign language refers to a language that is learnt in a place where that language is not typically used as the medium of everyday communication (see e.g. Oxford et al. 1996, 8). Sometimes, naturally, the distinction is not very clear. Hence, albeit Finnish learners of English have frequent contacts with English as the language of communication through the media, music and the Internet, for instance, and they thus also acquire and use English often informally, English is here considered a foreign language to them.

In vocational education, portfolios have been used for various purposes in many fields and subjects ranging from cookery to nursing and architectural studies (see e.g. *Portfolio ammatillisessa koulutuksessa* 1996). In addition, portfolios have been tried out as part of vocational teacher education and certification (Hänninen 1996; Keurulainen 1996). Furthermore, portfolios have been experimented with in higher education, for instance in foreign language teacher training (see e.g. Kohonen 1994; Eloranta 1996). In university contexts, portfolios have also been introduced as a tool for making one's merits more tangible when seeking employment or promotion (Karjalainen et al. 1995).

## Portfolios in foreign language education

> In the field of foreign language education, the advantages of using portfolios are obvious: provide students with opportunities to display good work, serve as a vehicle for critical self-analysis, and demonstrate mastery of a foreign language. (Padilla et al. 1996, 430.)

Portfolios are believed to be clearly advantageous in foreign language education (Padilla et al. 1996; Kohonen 1997; Takala 1997). Although reported foreign language portfolio experiments have not been numerous, some experiments have been reported both in Finland and elsewhere: the following paragraphs present some of them.

First, however, the links between functionalist views of language teaching and socio-constructivism will be discussed because they share many goals and features. For instance, they underline students' active participation in the learning activities and situations. Through active participation, learners also share their knowledge, skills and experiences and thus learn from each other. As a central goal in learning, they both emphasize functional use of knowledge and skills instead of mastery of separate facts and rules. Hence, they both offer a theoretical background for the use of portfolios in foreign language education.

## Functionalist approaches to foreign language teaching

As discussed above (see pp. 22–23), education and views of learning can be divided into two main paradigms, namely the behaviourist and contructivist paradigms. Similarly, the basic views of foreign language teaching can be divided into two main categories, or "streams of thought, each developing an integrated system of techniques devolving from its fundamental premises" (Rivers 1981, 25). The proponents of these two approaches or paradigms are called either the formalists and the activists (Rivers 1981) or the formalists and the functionalists (Laihiala-Kankainen 1993). Emphases in foreign language teaching have tended to shift from one approach to the other, and during the history of foreign language teaching both the formalists and the functionalists have had their eras of popularity. Often, however, language teaching methodology has been influenced by them both. Furthermore, no matter which paradigm has been more in vogue, teachers have normally used different methods and techniques eclectically. (Rivers 1981, 25–27; Laihiala-Kankainen 1993.)

The dichotomy of the foreign language teaching tradition is mostly based on how these paradigms see language and its functions (Laihiala-Kankainen 1993): whether language is essentially considered a form to be learnt and reproduced accurately according to normative rules, or a vehicle for communicating information, meaning and ideas as well as for expressing oneself for different purposes and in different contexts. These notions of language and its functions have influenced the teaching and learning of foreign languages: whether the teacher predominantly transmits the appropriate knowledge of the language and its forms and rules to students, who are mainly more or less passive recipients; or whether students chiefly study and learn the language by participating and using it actively, being active agents of their learning (cf. Kohonen 1992; von Wright 1993), even if their use of language would not always result in grammatically correct forms.

The main differences between the formalist and the functionalist approaches can be described as follows (Rivers 1981, 25–26; Laihiala-Kankainen 1993, 12–13):

**Language analysis or language use?**
In the formalist approach, language is seen as a form, and the emphasis in language

learning is on analysing language forms and learning the rules and their applications in detail. The functionalist approach sees language as a vehicle for communication, and the emphasis in teaching and learning is on students' active use of the language in realistic language situations.

**Deduction or induction?**
The formalist approach relies mostly on a deductive form of instruction, moving from a rule to its application. The functionalist approach prefers an inductive form of learning, moving from examples to rules, so that students themselves apprehend and develop the rules based on the ample examples they have been presented with.

**Details of grammar or functional grammar?**
The formalists lay great emphasis on accuracy in the application of grammar rules, even with the fine details of grammar. The functionalists call for a functional approach to grammar and structures, and students are first taught what is considered most useful and most generally applicable. The functionalists do not underline the importance of grammatical accuracy as much as the formalists but see confidence and success in communicating meaning in the language as being of greater importance than the perfection of form.

**Passive or active classroom?**
In a strictly formalist approach, the student has been a passive recipient of information and instruction, and thus the importance of the teacher's role and teaching the language have been emphasized. The functionalist approach attempts to provide opportunities for students to learn the language, and, thus, students' active participation in the learning activities and their active use of the language for communicating ideas and expressing themselves are encouraged.

**Priority of writing or speech?**
The formalists tend to place high value on skills in reading and accurate writing and also often in translation. The functionalists emphasize the priority of spoken language and consider oral communication, both speaking and understanding spoken language, to be a necessary accompaniment to fluent reading and writing.

The constructivist and socio-constructivist views of learning share many notions with the functionalist approach to language teaching. Learning is considered a product of the learners' own actions: therefore, the learners should be active agents of their own learning, not just receivers of information and teaching (Kohonen 1992; von Wright 1993). Teaching and studying should be flexible, and they should emphasize the learners' capacities. Studying should also be ecologically relevant, i.e. topics and tasks should relate to, and be important for, the students and their lives. Furthermore, learners should be able to try and test their constructs, their prior knowledge and skills as well as their ideas and notions about the matters they are learning – even if they do not arrive at 'right' conclusions – since learning is based on learners' active use and understanding of their constructs. Learning is also considered a situated process: learning cannot be separated from the learning situation and its context. Therefore, to be able to use the knowledge and skills in other contexts, learners should actively seek questions, connections, explanations, reasons and arguments as well as consequences of the phenomena or things they are studying during the learning process. (See e.g. Kohonen 1992; von Wright 1993; Rauste-von Wright & von Wright 1994.)

Ultimately, both the functionalist paradigm of foreign language education and the constructivist view of learning emphasize the importance of the learner's active and functional use of knowledge and skills over the memorization and mastery of facts and rules. They also stress that the learner needs to comprehend and to be able to evaluate knowledge and skills in order to be able to transfer and transform them into different contexts. Thus, metacognitive skills of learning to learn and self-assessment are seen important (cf. Kohonen 1997). In other words, both the functionalist paradigm of foreign language education and the constructivist view of learning aim at the learners' ability to use their knowledge and skills actively and functionally in various situations and for different functions and goals. In consequence, portfolios seem to fit into the functionalist paradigm of foreign language education

## Some EFL portfolio experiments

The following paragraphs present four portfolio projects in the teaching of English as a foreign language. The presented projects were mainly carried out in the secondary level education: therefore, considering the school level and the students' ages and previous studies, for instance, the contexts of the presented projects can be regarded as more or less comparable with the context of the present study. Three of the projects took place in Finland, one in Israel. Two of the Finnish experiments were carried out in the upper secondary school, one in a business college. However, in addition to these experiments, many other foreign language teachers have adapted portfolios to suit their teaching and its aims at various levels of education although few of them have publicly reported on their experiments.

## Some EFL portfolio experiments in Finland

### Reading portfolios in the culture course

Probably the first reported portfolio experiment in Finnish foreign language education took place in the Teacher Training School of the University of Oulu in the school year of 1992–1993. All the school's second-year upper secondary school students who had English as their first foreign language studied course number 6, the culture course, by compiling reading portfolios. The purpose was to promote the students' reading interests and skills: the participating teachers believed that students would benefit more if they could make the decisions on the texts, their topics and level of difficulty themselves. (Kauppinen et al. 1994.)

The students gathered texts dealing with different cultural topics from books, magazines and newspapers, read them, and processed them through various techniques: for instance, the students wrote summaries of texts, made vocabulary lists and sometimes even administered word quizzes to each other. The students could work on their own, in pairs or in groups. They also filled in guide sheets dealing with questions about the texts, the choices made and the working processes. The students were also expected to read a novel in English. In addition, they had some reading and listening comprehension exercises. The students reported on their work and learning either orally or in writing. Out of five weekly lessons, two were allotted to work on the texts of the students' own choice, two to listening and reading comprehension tasks and one to reporting and conferencing. (Kauppinen et al. 1994.)

The students compiled all their work in a folder which was later used as the basis for self-assessment and the course grade. They also suggested a grade for themselves. The grades given by the students themselves were, with two or three exceptions, consistent with the grades given by the teacher. Some students, however, were not really interested in their grades because they felt that a grade could not describe their work. (Kauppinen et al. 1994.)

According to the teachers, the grading of the portfolios was nevertheless difficult. Furthermore, the teachers experienced their role as facilitators or consultants of learning somewhat problematic at times: sometimes the teachers would have liked to be more in control, and sometimes the lack of a textbook and normal classroom routine challenged the teachers and their knowledge and skills with unexpected situations and questions. Moreover, guiding individual students proved difficult: some students were very self-directed and happy to be able to do what they wanted themselves, whereas some students found self-directed learning very confusing and difficult. Individual differences were apparent in the portfolios as well: some students compiled excellent portfolios, whereas some portfolios remained rather modest. However, the teachers were convinced that most students had worked diligently, and the students themselves also felt that they had worked more than during an ordinary course. Moreover, the teachers believed that the students had progressed in their learning during the portfolio course and that their self-esteem and trust in their own capacities had grown. (Kauppinen et al. 1994.)

### *Portfolios and teaching writing in the upper secondary school*

In the spring of 1996 Mäkinen (1996) tried out portfolios in the teaching of writing in English in the upper secondary school. The purpose was to highlight the students' strengths in writing, and not only their mistakes and shortcomings. Furthermore, the aim was to help the students to pay more attention to the writing process and to set criteria for good writing. Out of several writing exercises the students chose some for assessment and gave reasons for their selection. The students also gave feedback to each other. The final grade was based on both the writing portfolio and a course test. According to the teacher, the students were involved in their work and enjoyed it, were realistic in their self-assessments, and also gave good peer feedback. (Mäkinen 1996.)

### *Portfolios and self-access learning in a business college*

Mäntylä's (1996) experiment with portfolios as a tool for self-access studies at a Finnish business college in the school year 1994–1995 aimed at both studying and promoting business college students' readiness and willingness for self-access learning. Three groups participated in the experiment: first-year students of post upper secondary school level, third-year students of upper secondary level, and second-year low-proficiency students of upper secondary level. With the low-proficiency group the teacher had decided to discontinue the self-access experiment after a month and to return to a more traditional form of instruction. Some of these students, however, compiled self-access work files during their spare time. (Mäntylä 1996.)

In Mäntylä's experiment, not all students seemed ready for self-directed learning. Students' educational background, gender and English proficiency turned out to be significant factors in their self-direction: high-proficiency female students with an upper secondary school background were the most willing and able to study self-directedly. In accordance, their portfolios were comprehensive and also included selection and self-assessment. In contrast, low-proficiency students and students with a comprehensive school background did not seem to like self-directed learning. However, some students submitted working portfolios which included all their work but several students did not hand in any portfolio at all. Perhaps, as Mäntylä (1996, 141) concludes, these students would have needed more learner training and scaffolding to get used to a new method of learning. (Mäntylä 1996, 136–141.) Nevertheless, with such different student groups as the ones in Mäntylä's experiment, the differences in the students' self-direction and in the suitability of the portfolio approach can hardly be attributed to the factors of gender, language proficiency or educational background alone.

All the students who compiled portfolios were asked to assess their work in their learning log sheets. Furthermore, the students were asked to suggest and justify grades for themselves on the basis of their English studies, including both their self-access studies and their learning under classroom tuition. The teacher agreed with their suggestions almost without exception (Mäntylä 1996, 118). However, in contrast to the findings of some other portfolio experiments (see e.g. Kauppinen et al. 1994; Smith 1995), the grades of their portfolios appeared to be very important for most students (Mäntylä 1996, 139).

### *An Israeli portfolio project*

In Israel, Kari Smith (1995) conducted an action research project with seven teachers of English as a foreign language. During the school year of 1994–1995 the teachers created their own portfolio formats at various age groups and levels. Since the contexts, formats and outlines for the portfolio approaches were different, their purposes and functions presumably differed as well.

However, the portfolios had some common features. First, there were both obligatory core entries that all students had to include in their portfolios and optional entries that students could select themselves. Secondly, each entry had to be dated to give information of progress. Moreover, the student's self-reflection and assessment of the task was an obligatory part of each portfolio entry. Therefore, to help self-assessment, clear assessment criteria were presented to the students from the very beginning of each portfolio project. Thirdly, in all final showcase portfolios the students were asked to include an introduction explaining the purpose and goals of the portfolio and a conclusion reflecting the student's learning process. (Smith 1995, 4–5.)

The participating teachers noticed that the portfolio had a major impact on both learning and assessment processes. Firstly, the portfolio approach "was found to increase learners' responsibility and improve classroom work in terms of pupils' attitudes and motivation" (Smith 1995, 15). Furthermore, students seemed to become more aware that English was not only a set of structures but was used to convey information and feelings. The portfolio also seemed to help students to realize their strengths and weaknesses in learning English. As an assessment tool, the portfolio was found to give a more comprehensive picture of a student than a test or examination did. Nevertheless, according to all teachers, assessing and grading portfolios proved difficult. Therefore, it was considered essential that the assessment criteria should be made explicit to everybody involved with the portfolio from the very beginning. (Smith 1995, 8–10.)

The learners were also asked to assess their own portfolios according to the criteria agreed on at the beginning of the project. Most students were realistic in their self-assessment and, moreover, the students seemed to become less mark-oriented: "the mark became of much less importance than the work itself and the learning that had taken place" (Smith 1995, 10).

In the 12th grade matriculation group, the students also took the matriculation examination of the previous year, and a correlation between the students' examination marks and their portfolio marks was calculated. The correlation was found to be significant although the marks were not always the same. Some hard-working students scored better in the portfolio assessment, whereas some students did well in the examination but had not invested much work in their portfolios. Smith (1995, 12) considers the result expected and even desirable:

> Had the portfolio results been very similar to the exam results, one could replace the other, and the value of portfolio had to be questioned [sic]. - - The exam grade does not reflect anything but the learner outcome, which is, in my opinion, one of the several other objectives of education.

## Discussion of the EFL portfolio experiments

The portfolio experiments discussed above share many characteristics, even though their primary purposes and contexts were different. First of all, they all aimed at some degree of individualization both in studying and in assessment. Secondly, they all aimed at fostering students' self-assessment skills. Furthermore, some of the experiments clearly aimed at promoting students' self-direction in planning and carrying out their studies (Kauppinen et al. 1994; Mäntylä 1996). Moreover, through their portfolios, students could both realize and exhibit their strengths in English – and perhaps also their interests and needs for improvement.

Nevertheless, the portfolio approach appeared rather difficult at times: for instance, students' readiness and willingness to study self-directedly and to take responsibility for their own learning varied considerably (Kauppinen et al. 1994; Mäntylä 1996), which also caused some problems and controversies for the teachers in their role as facilitators of learning (Kauppinen et al. 1994). As an assessment tool, many of these teachers found portfolios very beneficial but also problematic: portfolios gave a more comprehensive picture of the learner but grading portfolios proved difficult (e.g. Kauppinen et al. 1994; Smith 1995).

Despite problems, many of the teachers and students found portfolios worth the effort. Students seemed to be more involved and interested in their own work and to take ownership of their English skills (e.g. Smith 1995; Mäkinen 1996). For some students, learning and the work they had done became even more important than the grade they got (Kauppinen et al. 1994; Smith 1995). Hence, the experiences could well be summarized in Takala's (1997, 7) words:

> It seems obvious that portfolios are a promising tool to be added to the language teachers' methodological toolbox. Properly used they are likely to be beneficial both in learning and the assessment of learning.

Although the present study shared many goals with the portfolio programmes discussed above, for instance promoting learner-centredness, students' active participation, self-direction and self-assessment as well as, naturally, developing their English skills, it primarily aimed at fostering students' empowerment through portfolios. Therefore, empowerment will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2

# Empowerment

Both in literature and in everyday discourse, empowerment is a concept which is widely used but seldom explicitly defined (Mulligan & Griffin 1992, 27; Mondros & Wilson 1994, 5; Karl 1995, 14). It is used in many fields and different disciplines. Furthermore, in different contexts, to different people and at different times, it has different meanings and connotations (Evans 1992, 85). Sometimes the connotations are politically loaded, sometimes empowerment seems to be used mainly as a buzzword currently in vogue.

In order to diminish the fuzziness of the term and, moreover, to define empowerment in the context of the present study, I shall discuss some definitions or descriptions of empowerment – some of which are explicitly stated, some only implied. First, I shall discuss the use of the term in its perhaps most typical and original contexts and fields, namely political and social sciences and women's studies, even though these fields of study may seem quite remote to foreign language education. Empowerment is approached from three slightly different angles or aspects which, in my opinion, can be discerned in the diverse use of the term, namely empowerment as giving power, empowerment as taking power and, finally, empowerment as taking charge of one's power.

Empowerment is currently used widely also in educational discussion. The explicit and implicit definitions of empowerment in education will thus be addressed. Furthermore, as this experiment took place in the context of the Finnish upper secondary school, the aims and implementation of empowerment as implied in the official objectives of upper secondary education will be considered.

Finally, I shall discuss and define empowerment in the framework of this thesis and, furthermore, introduce the concepts of *learner empowerment* and *lingual empowerment*.

## Empowerment in social and political sciences and women's studies

According to the *Oxford advanced learner's dictionary of current English* (1989, 394), *to empower* means to '(frm) give lawful power or authority (to sb) to act'. *Webster's encyclopedic unabridged dictionary of the English language* (1994, 468) defines the verb *to empower* as 'to give power or authority; to authorize' and as 'to enable, to permit'. *Webster's dictionary* (1994, 468) also lists *to warrant, commision, license* and *qualify* as synonyms for *to empower.* In addition to the descriptions of empowerment as giving someone authority or legal right or power, the *Longman dictionary of contemporary English* (1995, 446) defines *to empower* also as 'to give someone more control over their own life or situation'.

Some writers also link empowerment with *advocacy* and *self-advocacy* (Sutcliffe 1990; Braye & Preston-Shoot 1995). In addition, the terms empowerment and *autonomy* are sometimes used almost interchangeably. In the present thesis, however, the term empowerment is regarded as a process and autonomy as a state or a capacity (cf. e.g. Little 1991): nevertheless, the terms overlap since empowerment can be seen as a process aiming towards autonomy (see e.g. Kenny 1993).

Historically, the roots of empowerment can be traced far back. When discussing the history of empowerment in American social work, Simon (1994) connects the roots of empowerment thinking with the Reformation, Jeffersonianism and utopian socialism, for example, since they all have contributed to the ideas of civil, political and social citizenship. Sometimes the ideas have complemented each other, sometimes clashed, but they all have provided some kind of background for the development of the idea of empowerment in social work. Later, for instance Gandhi, Freire, Civil Rights and Black Power movements as well as feminism and sexual rights movements have been influential actors, ideas or movements contributing to the notions of empowerment particularly in social work in the United States (Simon 1994).

> The Jeffersonian preference for "bottom-up" democracy has remained an essential plank in the floor of empowerment tradition as has his insistence on the need of literacy and education for all who would be called upon to act as citizens. (Simon 1994, 38.)

## Empowerment as giving people power and resources

Sometimes empowerment is a loaded term in a political or even in a revolutionary sense. It can be used in the *emancipatory* sense of giving power to the oppressed (cf. Freire 1972) or the disempowered (Friedmann 1992). The oppressed or disempowered are defined, for instance, as "the vulnerable and disadvantaged social groups" (Moghadam 1991, 6) who have little or no access to the bases of power, whether that power is political, social or personal (Freire 1972; Moghadam 1991; Friedmann 1992). In other words, they have little or no say in decision-making and in "allocation of power, authority, and resources" that affect them as well (Moghadam 1991, 6; see also Friedmann 1992). Emancipating – or empowering – the disempowered can take various forms of political, legislative, economic, social or educational actions (see e.g. Freire 1972; Friedmann 1992; Hall 1992).

Empowerment is often also used in the sense of *giving people means* to take better charge of their life and to fulfil their potential. This can start, for instance, by increasing people's knowledge of their rights (see e.g. Karl 1995). Increasing their knowledge and skills and also their economic resources by allowing them more opportunities for schooling and employment gives them more means to take control over their lives (see e.g. Moghadam 1991; Hall 1992; Karl 1995). Promoting people's participation in decision-making and giving them public recognition – whether as members of society, different organizations or groups – empowers them not only because it may give them more access to power but because "it gives them a voice" (cf. e.g. Giroux 1989; Friedmann 1992) and thus fosters their empowerment in the sense that *they see that their actions can bring about changes* (see e.g. Friedmann 1992; Hall 1992; Mondros & Wilson 1994; Karl 1995).

People's resources can be enhanced also by encouraging them in their aspirations to fulfil their potential. For instance, people can be encouraged in their career development by giving them not only equal opportunities and qualifications but also positive role models and support (Sagaria 1988; Evans 1992).

The underlying idea in these examples of empowerment is that, in addition to emancipating and liberating the disempowered parties, they are *given more power and resources to act in order to take control over their lives and to try to fulfil their potential* (see e.g. Sagaria 1988; Evans 1992; Friedmann 1992; Hall 1992; Mondros & Wilson 1994; Karl 1995). However, empowerment, particularly in social work, should not mean *doing good to or for* the disempowered but *with* them: empowerment should be based on participation and partnership, not paternalism (Simon 1994; Braye & Preston-Shoot 1995).

> Empowerment-based social work practice conceives of paternalism as alien to its essential values and purpose. Averse to assuming either the posture of the benefactor or the liberator, the social worker functioning within the empowerment tradition seeks neither to lift a client "up" to the professional's level nor to lead clients out to a promised land mapped out previously or independently by the professionals.
>
> Instead, the social worker who is intent upon client empowerment attempts to initiate and sustain interactions with clients and client groups that will inspire them to define a promised land for themselves, to believe themselves worthy of it, and to envision intermediate approximations of that destination that they can reach, in a step-by-step fashion, while remaining in reciprocal connection with each other and with a professional guide who offers technical and emotional help. (Simon 1994, 7)

## Empowerment as accepting, assuming or taking power

In some of the examples above, the empowered is seen as a somewhat passive object, a recipient of power and resources: somebody to whom the power is given by someone else. According to many writers, however, this is only part of the process of empowerment:

> Empowerment is blunted when it is viewed by professionals as merely another way of enabling, when it is used on the users' behalf, effectively overlooking their own power struggles. - - Even the very term empowerment does not do justice to the changes it attempts to describe. It implies the granting of a gift whereas, in reality, it is not there to be given. (Braye & Preston-Shoot 1995, 110.)

> Empowerment is a process and is not, therefore, something that can be given to people. (Karl 1995, 14.)

> Empowerment can be defined as 'becoming powerful'. It embodies two dimensions: being given power and taking power. (Adams 1991, 208.)

> It is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as Subjects of the transformation. (Freire 1972, 97.)

According to these writers, power can be given to people only to some extent, for instance, through legislation and by enhancing their resources. Nevertheless, in order to become empowered, people have to *participate and act themselves* and they have to become subjects or agents in the process of empowerment. In other words, people who want more power and efficacy "must themselves be principal actors who initiate and sustain the pursuit of empowerment" (Simon 1994, 34). Acting themselves does not, however, mean acting alone or without help and support (Simon 1994, 34; see also Cochran 1988).

In some cases power can be taken – sometimes quite forcefully – by a person or a group. Politically, the examples are numerous: countries claiming their independence, Blacks demanding their rights, and women demanding the right to vote. This kind of empowerment, sometimes also called *self-empowerment* (see e.g. Adams 1991; Friedmann 1992; Simon 1994), can take place through various forms of action and involvement ranging, for instance, from revolutions to protests, from participating in different political, social or community organizations to individual choices, capacity building, persistance and development (see e.g. Freire 1972; Adams 1991; Friedmann 1992; Hall 1992; Mondros & Wilson 1994; Karl 1995).

> Empowerment happens not just because powerful people give away power, but because oppressed people engage in wresting it from them, speaking out *against* abuse and oppression, and *for* changes in systems, demanding a radical rather than a liberal or functionalist form of partnership, which alters rather than works within existing power relations and traditional definitions of need and agency responsibilities. (Braye & Preston-Shoot 1995, 100; emphasis original.)

The underlying idea in all these actions is *the individuals' or groups' involvement, engagement and active participation in order to become empowered.* Often active participation and engagement requires the persons' understanding of their situation and of themselves, of their weaknesses and strengths (see e.g.

Hall 1992). Furthermore, the people's perceptions of themselves and their abilities have a central role in their willingness to actively participate (Cochran 1988).

> Empowering practice requires a personal 'will' or belief that it is possible and desirable. (Braye & Preston-Shoot 1995, 114.)

## Empowerment as taking charge and ownership of one's power and resources

Talking about women's empowerment, Karl (1995, 14) views empowerment as a process and a "continuum of several interrelated and mutually reinforced components":

> In short, empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, to greater decision-making power and control, and to transformative action.

Also Cochran (1988, 23–24) considers empowerment a gradual process with several interrelated aspects and different steps:

> Empowerment is an interactive process, involving mutual respect and critical reflection, through which both individuals and controlling institutions are changed in ways that provide those people with greater influence over the forces that are influencing their efforts to achieve equal status in society.

Furthermore, Cochran (1988) believes that both the persons' perceptions of themselves and co-operation, support, mutual trust and appreciation between the parties concerned are important factors in active involvement and, thus, in the process of empowerment. However, Cochran (1988, 28) points out that in order to promote empowerment, the involvement should be real and meaningful for the participants. In sum, Cochran (1988) regards empowerment as a process that entails aspects of promoting opportunities and access to power, strength and resources; furthermore, empowerment also entails promoting the human spirit, enhancing self-esteem, and stimulating active, personal involvement and action with the support of others in co-operation and in mutual trust.

Thus, if empowerment is seen as a process aiming towards responsible autonomy, getting power, either by being given it or by taking it, is not necessarily enough. The third dimension in the process of empowerment is *taking charge of one's power and, consequently, taking responsibility for one's own actions in order to fulfil one's potential*. Sometimes also called human empowerment, it also entails strengthening and taking charge of one's potentials (see e.g. Eteläpelto 1993): according to Hall (1992, 27), "empowerment is synonymous with the growth and maturation of self". In other words, becoming empowered means becoming a subject, an active and responsible agent of one's own life (cf. the cognitive-constructivist view of learning). Hence, empowerment also implies ownership of one's life and potential:[2]

> When Jerry talks to you on the tape he owns what he knows, and he has control over his life and that is empowerment. (Tate 1992, 131.)

However, the individual is not in isolation of his or her social context and reality. Empowerment is thus also *a situated process* which is always influenced by the cultural and social context (cf. the socio-constructivist view of learning):

> Empowerment is, at one and the same time, an end, a set of means to that end, and an unfolding historical process, one in which actors have made choices that are deeply affected by the orthodox and heterodox ideas and forces that converge in the time and place in which they have lived. (Simon 1994, 46.)

## Empowerment in education

The term empowerment appears in both academic and everyday educational discussion. Many educational reforms and tools, such as action research (see e.g. Kincheloe 1991), experiential learning (Mulligan & Griffin 1992; Kenny

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[2] Some Finnish authors also use the Finnish term *elämänhallinta* (managing or controlling one's life) when discussing empowerment and its different aspects (see e.g. Olkinuora 1993; Roos 1987, 1988). For example, Roos (1988, 132) defines the term *elämänhallinta* as a shield against external turmoil and catastrophe and, on the other hand, an opportunity to and interest in changing one's life into the direction one wants himself or herself.

1993), computer learning networks (Warschauer et al. 1994) and portfolios (see e.g. Weinbaum 1991; Cooper & Brown 1992; De Fina 1992; Smolen et al. 1995), are advertised as vehicles for either student or teacher empowerment. Once again, empowerment is seldom explicitly defined.

The notion of active agency characterizes many implicit or explicit definitions of empowerment in educational contexts. However, in order to be able to become active agents of their learning, students must have opportunities to participate actively. Thus, the definitions of empowerment in education also bring out all the three aspects discussed above: (1) the learner getting power, opportunities and resources as an object, (2) the learner accepting and assuming them, and (3) the learner taking charge of his or her actions as well as responsibility for his or her learning as an active subject or agent. Kenny expresses his ideas of educational empowerment as follows:

> Education is about empowerment and what it empowers is people's autonomy. This allows them opportunities to generate knowledge, as opposed to being passive consumers of it. What learners must do is initiate, plan, organize and carry out work of their own. This is autonomy in practice and can lead to the challenge of innate belief systems and assumptions. This in turn begins to unblock peoples' capacities for independent and interdependent thought and action. (Kenny 1993, 431.)

## Giving students power and resources

Curricular and pedagogical reforms are often regarded as a key to offering students both decision-making power and opportunities and resources for active participation.

Giroux, who defines empowerment as "the ability to think and act critically" (1989, 138), links empowerment with a pedagogy of student experience, a pedagogy that emphasizes students' role as active agents and producers of knowledge and meaning who are allowed to draw upon their own experience and resources:

> The discourse of student experience supports a view of pedagogy and empowerment that allows students to draw upon their own experiences and cultural resources and that also enables them to play a self-consciously active role as producers of knowledge within the teaching and learning process. This is a pedagogy in which students get the knowledge and skills that allow them to ascertain how the multiple interests that con-

> stitute their individual and collective voices are implicated, produced, affirmed, or marginalized within the texts, institutional practices, and social structures that both shape and give meaning to their lives. (Giroux 1989, 148.)

Accordingly, teachers should not be interested only in empowerment based on individual achievement and traditional academic success but, instead, be also "concerned in their teaching with linking empowerment . . . to the concept of social engagement and transformation" (Giroux 1989, 138).

> The pedagogical goal here is not to have students exercise rigorous analytical skills in order to arrive at the right answer, but to better exercise reasoned choice through a critical understanding of what the codes are that organize different meanings and interests into particular configurations of knowledge and power. (Giroux 1989, 149–150)

Kemmis (1994, 1995) seems perhaps more critical towards empowerment. He points out that students' powerlessness is often the reality in school, partly because of their status, partly because of different social, pedagogical and curricular practices of schooling (Kemmis 1995). Thus, instead of using the term empowerment, Kemmis suggests that the term *undisempowerment* should be used because, in his opinion, empowerment "suggests that individuals need no special courage, tenacity or intelligence to break the shackles that prevent [t]hem from determining their own lives and the conditions of their lives" (Kemmis 1994, 5). Accordingly, Kemmis (1994, 1995) emphasizes the importance of the individual's or group's active agency, courage and determination to become empowered. Nevertheless, he also sees some pedagogical actions aiming at diminishing students' powerlessness (Kemmis 1994, 1995) – in other words, aiming towards their undisempowerment.

> Probably most students experience powerlessness in schooling much of the time, partly as a consequence of their status vis-a-vis the (professional) status of their teachers. Yet education also aims to help students acquire the knowledge and skills which will provide them with the means for self-determination and self-realisation in their lives. Moreover, many teachers do not just see these matters as things to be deferred until students have completed their schooling; they try to counter the injustice of powerlessness within teaching and learning in the classroom, for example by an approach like that of negotiating the curriculum, as a process which can foster the development of students' own capacities and decision making powers, and demonstrate that they are accorded respect as persons in the daily interactions of schooling. (Kemmis 1995, 12.)

Sapon-Shevin and Schniedewind (1991) lay the blame for students' powerlessness and oppression on the competitive structures and practices of the schooling systems:

> The typical classroom is framed by competition, marked by struggle between students (and often between teacher and students), and riddled by indicators of comparative achievement and worth. Star charts on the wall announce who has been successful at learning multiplication tables, only children with "neat" handwriting have their papers posted for display, the class-three reading groups are homogeneously composed (with all students aware of which is the "low" group), and the teacher cajoles good behavior by saying "I like the way Noreen is doing her work" and by choosing the "quietest table" to go to lunch first. As described above, this competitive orientation leads to isolation and alienation. (Sapon-Shevin & Schniedewind 1991, 165.)

As an alternative to competitive practices at school, Sapon-Shevin and Schniedewind (1991; see also Schniedewind & Sapon-Shevin 1997) regard co-operative learning as a strategy for achieving social equity and justice in classrooms and thus empowering students to make also their own lives more equitable:

> People who feel empowered and confident about their potential and their opportunities can change existing, inequitable social structures, in other words, develop a greater "social conscience". (Schniedewind & Sapon-Shevin 1997, 1.)

One of their main premises is that co-operatively structured learning is truly democratic as "all students are active group participants and have equal access to learning opportunities and to resources" (Sapon-Shevin & Schniedewind 1991, 166). Co-operative classrooms also create "communities of caring" as students take responsibility for both themselves and others in co-operative learning activities. Furthermore, heterogeneity and diversity of ethnic backgrounds, religions, interests, skills and knowledge are valued in co-operative classrooms. (Sapon-Shevin & Schniedewind 1991, 166–167.)

However, co-operative pedagogy can become a powerful strategy of empowerment "only if students and teachers are able to redefine their roles in the decision-making process, allowing for increasing levels of student *and* teacher autonomy and independence" (Sapon-Shevin & Schniedewind 1991, 173; emphasis original):

> If students learn to do as they are told solely because an authority figure expects it, they will be less inclined to challenge and change inequality in society. If they are learning, however, that they can become capable and responsible for cooperatively solving difficult problems affecting their lives, they will know from experience that by sharing power and working together people can make changes. (Sapon-Shevin & Schniedewind 1991, 173.)

According to Sapon-Shevin and Schniedewind (1991), to become fully empowering, co-operative learning should not be regarded as an activity or a technique but as a central organizing value in the classroom that permeates student-teacher relations, teaching and learning methodologies, and also content. Co-operative learning as an empowering pedagogy also requires skills and critical reflection:

> The process of empowerment involves critical reflection on the nature of oppression; a vision of alternative models of interaction, decision making, and power; and the skills necessary to implement this vision. Cooperative learning is a pedagogy that provides personal power and group support. Educators can build into academic content and ongoing class discussion a critical awareness of the effects of competition and inequality on our lives and ideas for their alternatives – cooperation and multiculturalism. From such pedagogy and content, students then have the skills and consciousness necessary to create changes that empower them personally and that can catalyze social change. (Sapon-Shevin & Schniedewind 1991, 178.)

## Students accepting an active role and taking charge of their learning

In addition to requiring opportunities, resources and skills to participate, students' role as active agents and producers of knowledge and meaning requires also students' willingness to have an active and responsible role in their learning. For various reasons, students may sometimes feel that they do not want to assume responsibility for their learning (e.g. Rogers 1983, 190; Ho & Crookall 1995, 236; Victori & Lockhart 1995, 223–224). They may find an active role demanding and even intimidating, and they may feel that they are not capable of participating actively. For example, students may be used to more teacher-centred methods with the teacher in control, and they may not understand what is expected of them in their new, more active role (see e.g. Hiemstra & Sisco 1990, 70–76; Warschauer et al. 1994, 9–12; Ho & Crookall 1995):

> Person-centered education is threatening to the student. It is much easier to conform and complain than to take responsibility, make mistakes, and live with the consequences. In addition, students have been directed for so many years that they long for continuance of the security of being told what to do. (Rogers 1983, 190.)

Furthermore, students may consider transmission of knowledge to be a teaching method which is more effective than a learner-centred and learner-directed one (Hiemstra & Sisco 1990, 70–76; Little 1991, 46–48). They may also feel uncertain about their success in examinations and other forms of assessment if the styles of teaching and assessment change (Little 1991, 47).

Carl Rogers (1983), although not using the term empowerment as such, speaks for person-centred learning. Person-centred learning affects the learner's whole person and, thus, it shares a great deal with experiential learning (see Rogers 1983, 20; cf. Kolb 1984). Furthermore, it emphasizes a facilitative mode of teaching and the learners' role as responsible and acknowledged figures in control of their own, individual learning needs, goals and processes. Accordingly, Rogers explains the politics, i.e. "the process of gaining, using, sharing, or relinquishing power and decision making" (Rogers 1983, 187) of person-centred education as follows:

> Consider the political implications of person-centered education. Who has the essential power and control? It is clear that it is the learner, or the learners as a group, including the facilitator-learner.
>
> Who is attempting to gain control over whom? The student is in the process of gaining control over the course of her own learning and her own life. The facilitator relinquishes control over others, retaining only control over herself.
>
> I see two strategies used in relation to power. The facilitator provides a psychological climate in which the learner is able to take responsible control. The facilitator also helps to de-emphasize static or content goals and, thus, encourages a focus on the process, on *experiencing* the way in which learning takes place. (Rogers 1983, 189; emphasis original.)

Along the same lines of thought, Hiemstra and Sisco (1990) advocate individualization of learning and instruction as well as the facilitative model of teaching as a means of making learning empowering, personal and successful. They emphasize the importance – but difficulty – of negotiation between the teacher and the learner in the individualization of learning. It is not always easy for learners to take and accept responsibility, nor is it always easy for the teacher to share power or to know how best to support learners in their individual learning needs and processes and in their individual processes of empowerment.

> Individualizing instruction in a nontraditional setting has tremendous potential for meeting the needs of many learners, especially if the facilitator can find ways of empowering the learner to take personal responsibility for much of the learning that occurs. It has been our experience that such empowerment is possible, but it takes patience and perseverance on the part of both the learners and facilitators. Fortunately, the payoff for learners is the realization that they can make decisions that result in real personal benefits. (Hiemstra & Sisco 1990, 149.)

Sapon-Shevin and Schniedewind (1991), who advocate co-operative learning as an empowering pedagogy as seen above, emphasize the importance of structuring co-operative groups and activities in such a way that every student's input is needed and every student's efforts and strengths are valued. The fact that students are not competing with each other in co-operative learning but working for "the common good" fosters students' appreciation of diversity but also students' appreciation of their own personal strengths (Schniedewind & Sapon-Shevin 1997). Furthermore, working for the common good, both the "teacher and students attempt to include, not exclude, to see that no one is left out or left behind" (Schniedewind & Sapon-Shevin 1997). The appreciation of diversity, the positive feeling of both mutual and individual responsibility as well as the development of social skills and critical reflection are all believed to foster students' willingness to become active participants and change agents, and thus they are also believed to promote students' empowerment (Schniedewind & Sapon-Shevin 1997).

Kenny (1993), who also strongly advocates experiential learning as a context for fostering empowerment and autonomy both in education in general and in foreign or second language education, emphasizes the idea that empowerment aiming towards autonomy means more than "permitting choice in learning situations, or making pupils responsible for the activities they undertake" (Kenny 1993, 440). For Kenny (1993, 440), empowerment and autonomy are a matter of "allowing and encouraging learners, through processes deliberately set up for the purpose, to begin to express who they are, what they think, and what they would like to do, in terms of work they initiate and define for themselves". Thus, empowerment and autonomy in education is about validating the learners' voices.

> Indeed it can be said that only when autonomy is being allowed to function is education taking place at all. For where autonomy is repressed or ignored – in other words where the learner has no say or no being – then what we have is not education but some sort of conditioning procedure; the imposition and reinforcement of dominant opinion. But education as an emancipatory agent empowers a person's autonomy, which allows new interpretations of the world and the possibility of change. (Kenny 1993, 440.)

Teaching students metacognitive skills – learning to learn and think – is also seen as an essential factor in learners' empowerment to become independent learners:

> Empowering our students essentially means four things: (1) teaching students what enhances and what impedes learning; (2) helping them recognize and further develop their own personal learning strengths; (3) teaching them specific thinking and learning strategies; and (4) passing on the responsibility for learning to them. (Redding 1990, 46.)

On a more concrete level, Warschauer, Turbee and Roberts (1994) advocate computer learning networks in second language learning as a vehicle for student empowerment. Without defining the term, they talk about a process of student empowerment and its connections to, for instance, collaborative learning, social discourse, a sense of community, and direct engagement.

Warschauer, Turbee and Roberts also discuss three specific aspects of empowerment: student autonomy, equality and learning skills. Student autonomy refers mainly to students' increased control over the content of the course and their opportunity to communicate with others at their own pace and without the constraints of ordinary verbal classroom discussion. This is believed to result in more student-centred and authentic communication and further opportunities for self-expression. Equality is regarded as another aspect of student empowerment. Equality means, for instance, allowing all students more equal participation and their own pace and style in learning. (Warschauer et al. 1994, 3–9.)

Furthermore, Warschauer, Turbee and Roberts (1994, 7–9) maintain that computer learning networks promote student empowerment through developing their learning skills and a critical learning perspective. For instance, as writing is believed to help thinking, computer networking helps students to develop their own ideas. By developing their ideas collectively, students learn "better ways of learning and producing knowledge" since "learning is a social activity and knowledge is socially produced" (Warschauer et al. 1994, 7). Moreover, as a vital part of student empowerment in the era of the information explosion, "knowing how to find and interpret facts is more important than memorizing them" (Warschauer et al. 1994, 7).

Portfolios are also seen as a concrete vehicle for student or teacher empowerment by numerous authors. Some of these writers use the term empowerment or to empower explicitly (see e.g. Weinbaum 1991; Cooper & Brown 1992; De Fina 1992; Pollari 1995; Smolen et al. 1995), whereas some describe portfolios as a tool for "sharing control" and for "collaborative assessment" (Glazer & Brown 1993) as well as a vehicle for students' "increased autonomy" (Gold 1992, 21) and "ownership" of their work and learning (e.g. D'Aoust 1992, 43; Yancey 1992, 113). Nevertheless, the notion of students' empowerment in the learning process is embedded in all these descriptions.

As can be seen above, various methods and tools are advocated as vehicles for empowerment. Some of them are considered to give students more power and resources, some of them are believed to invite students to take charge of the power and resources given to them as well as of their own potentials. Although the advocates usually speak very strongly for their own methods or tools, there hardly is one and only way to promote students' empowerment. Moreover, I do not believe that any method or tool as such can empower students: all the methods and tools discussed above could also be used in a very structured and teacher-directed way that would not allow students any real decision-making power. Therefore, in my opinion, the context and atmosphere that allows and encourages learners to "begin to express who they are, what they think, and what they would like to do" (Kenny 1993, 440) plays the most decisive role in empowerment. Within such an atmosphere and such a view of learning that validates the learners' voices and encourages all the participants to share power and to negotiate goals, guidelines and criteria, many different tools and methods can help to promote students' empowerment.

## Empowerment and the Finnish upper secondary school

Traditional schooling with its notions of knowledge and learning and with its teacher-directed working methods has been criticized also in Finland for not providing students with readiness, skills and knowledge that they need in real life (see e.g. Olkinuora 1993). Therefore, education is required to increasingly foster students' participation, self-directedness and responsibility as well as their metacognitive skills and motivation for learning (see e.g. Olkinuora 1993). In other words, education is expected to promote students' empowerment for life.

Consequently, although the term empowerment is not used explicitly, the official objectives of the Finnish upper secondary education stated in the *Framework curriculum for the senior secondary school*[3] (1994) aim at empowering students. The same objective is also embedded in many recent reforms undertaken in the Finnish school system. The goals of upper secondary education are, for instance, to support students' personal growth and maturation, to develop students' study skills and their responsibility and willingness to take an active role in their learning, and to promote students' ability and willingness for continuous, lifelong study. The teacher's role is to guide, encourage and support students in this process. (*Framework curriculum for the senior secondary school* 1994, 10–21). To quote the *Framework curriculum*:

> Instruction in the senior secondary school should try to provide learning environments where students can develop knowledge and skills that are vital for their continued studies and their own objectives. - - The aim is that students could work in the best possible way according to their individual abilities.
>
> Efficient teaching means, above all, that students are offered the most favourable learning environments and that they develop a positive intrinsic learning motivation. The role of the teacher is emphasized in the guiding of students, in support and encouragement to independent study that utilizes various sources of information efficiently. Every teacher has a responsibility to develop study skills and the skill to make choices. (*Framework curriculum for the senior secondary school* 1994, 17.)

Students' active, initiative and responsible role in their learning is considered essential also for their further studies (see e.g. Ratilainen 1994, 289–292; Välijärvi 1994, 283–286; cf. Aittola 1992, 80–92) and for their working life (*Framework curriculum for the senior secondary school* 1994, 17). Moreover, promotion of students' physical, social and mental well-being, their positive self-esteem, self-knowledge and cultural identity, as well as their growth to become active and responsible members of society, are considered central objectives of the senior secondary education (*Framework curriculum for the senior secondary school* 1994, 10–21):

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[3] When referring to the Finnish *lukio*, the National Board of Education uses the term senior secondary school. However, I am more accustomed to the term upper secondary school and, therefore, both terms are used interchangeably in this thesis.

> Characteristics of a viable democratic society include equality between citizens and citizens' willingness to participate in the running of public affairs, in social debate, and in decision-making. - -
>
> One objective of the senior secondary school is to develop attitudes and abilities in students that enable them to act as critical, responsible, and active members of a democratic society. The equality of the sexes as an educational objective means that boys and girls obtain abilities to act with equal rights and duties in the family, in working life, and in society. (*Framework curriculum for the senior secondary school* 1994, 21.)

Consequently, some recent school reforms have been made to promote the official aims of senior secondary education. Apajalahti (1994, 34–35) mentions three central statutory decisions that give upper secondary school students more power and increase their responsibility. First, students are *given more opportunities to choose optional courses* to construct individual and personal curricula and study programmes. Secondly, *nongradedness* also broadens students' opportunities for personal choices concerning their studies. Thirdly, *opportunities for both independent and co-operative study* increase students' power and resources in two respects: students can study some courses independently without participating in classroom tuition, and guided independent learning can also develop students' study skills and responsibility for their own studies. (Apajalahti 1994, 34–35; see also Vuorinen & Välijärvi 1994.)

Increasing students' responsibility is not, however, considered unproblematic: for instance, some students may not be capable or willing to take responsibility for planning and controlling their studies (Apajalahti 1994, 34–35; Vuorinen & Välijärvi 1994). Therefore, to get resources to become active and responsible students, students need teachers' support and help as well as good student guidance (Apajalahti 1994, 34–35; Vuorinen & Välijärvi 1994). Furthermore, it is essential to promote students' metacognitive skills, critical thinking, learning to learn and readiness for continuous learning because they constitute vital resources in taking control and responsibility for one's learning. Many-sided assessment methods and feedback as well as students' self-assessment are also considered important in fostering students' learning skills. (See e.g. von Wright 1993; Linnakylä 1994; Vuorinen & Välijärvi 1994; see also *Framework curriculum for the senior secondary school* 1994.)

In summary, Finnish senior secondary education aims at empowering students by giving them both some decision-making power and resources to be able to take charge of their learning and of their potentials and to become active and responsible citizens. Nevertheless, students' opportunities to use their decision-making power are still rather restricted (cf. Kenny 1993), and they also vary between different schools (Vuorinen & Välijärvi 1994, 42–43; Mehtäläinen 1998). For instance, students may choose which *optional* courses to study, but the choices depend very much on what courses the school offers. Students may also decide on the rhythm and pace at which they study compulsory courses; in other words, they have some freedom in composing their time-tables for different periods. However, students have little legal power on deciding matters concerning the contents and teaching or learning methods of their courses. For instance, students may not generally choose their courses on the basis of who teaches the course: when several teachers teach the same subject, students are not usually told which teacher teaches which course. Furthermore, students are seldom told beforehand what kind of study and assessment methods will be used in a given course. (Mehtäläinen 1998; see also Vuorinen & Välijärvi 1994). Thus, students' empowerment or autonomy in terms of their decision-making power is often limited to letting students organize their time-tables and to permitting them some choice in learning situations – the extent of those choices, naturally, depends very much on the school and on the teachers.

## Empowerment as defined in the present study

On the basis of the ideas extracted from both the explicit and implicit definitions of empowerment discussed above, in this thesis the term empowerment is used to refer to *a process entailing the aspects of getting power, accepting and assuming it, and taking charge of it.* In other words, the empowered is here regarded as an active agent who may be given power as an object or a recipient, but who also accepts it and takes charge of it actively as a responsible subject. Power refers here, for instance, to having power to make decisions concerning oneself, but also having enough opportunities, resources and means to have both the readiness and willingness to take charge of one's actions and potentials actively and responsibly.

As seen in some of the quotations above, both empowerment and *autonomy* are often used to refer to the person – in this case the learner – having the power, responsibility and control over his or her actions and learning; the terms *self-direction* and *learner-centredness* are also often used in a similar sense (see e.g. Eriksson 1993, 35–43):

> The main characteristics of autonomy as an approach to learning is that students take some significant responsibility for their own learning over and above responding to instruction. (Boud 1988, 23.)

In addition, some definitions of learner autonomy emphasize learners' willingness to take charge of their own learning. For instance, Trim (1988, 3) defines learner autonomy as the learner's "willingness and ability to act independently as a socially responsible person, to take charge of one's actions and one's own learning in the service of one's needs".

Furthermore, the background factors contributing to the concepts of autonomy, self-direction and empowerment are traced to the same origins, sources, developments and currents of thought (see e.g. Simon 1994; Gremmo & Riley 1995). In addition, some authors speak of the process and different steps or degrees of becoming autonomous, even though they do not use the term empowerment as such (see e.g. Huttunen 1986, 1990; Dickinson 1987, 1995; Little 1991, 1995; Wenden 1991, 1995; Cotterall 1995). Thus, the terms empowerment and autonomy might, perhaps, be considered interchangeable in some cases.

However, in this thesis empowerment is clearly considered a process with different aspects and degrees whereas some authors regard autonomy as a state or a capacity (cf. e.g. Holec 1981, 3–4; Little 1991, 4):

> "Autonomy" is thus a term describing a potential capacity to act in a given situation – in our case learning – and not the actual behaviour of an individual in that situation.
>
> To say of a learner that he is autonomous is therefore to say that he is capable of taking charge of his own learning and nothing more: all the practical decisions he is going to make regarding his learning can be related to this capacity he possesses but must be distinguished from it. (Holec 1981, 3.)

The terms empowerment and autonomy, nevertheless, overlap in the sense that empowerment is considered a process aiming towards an individual's or a group's responsible autonomy that enables them to fulfil their potentials (see e.g. Kenny 1993; cf. Dickinson 1987, 2).

For the purposes of the present study, the term empowerment is divided into two partly overlapping sub-concepts, namely learner empowerment and lingual empowerment. Learner empowerment refers to students' active role in, and control of, their learning processes. Learner empowerment also entails and aims at students' ownership of their learning and potential. In the framework of this EFL teaching experiment, fostering learner empowerment thus aimed at students' lingual empowerment, i.e. their ownership of their English skills and, accordingly, their willingness and ability to use English.

### Learner empowerment

In this thesis, the term learner empowerment means a process of students getting and accepting an active and responsible role in studying and learning. It includes students having freedom and power to make decisions concerning their studying and learning as well as students assuming and accepting this freedom and power along with responsibility for their own learning. The decisions may entail, for example, what, how, where and when to study (cf. e.g. Huttunen 1986, 28; Boud 1988, 23). Learner empowerment also includes controlling, monitoring and assessing one's work, learning and learning outcomes (cf. Huttunen 1986, 28; Boud 1988, 23). In other words, learner empowerment entails students' accepted authority to make decisions and to control, monitor and assess their work. Furthermore, learner empowerment also entails students taking ownership and charge of their resources and potential, as well as of their learning, knowledge and skills.

When discussing learner autonomy, Holec (1981, 4) defines taking charge of one's learning as follows:

> To take charge of one's learning is to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning, ie
> - determining the objectives
> - defining the contents and progressions
> - selecting methods and techniques to be used
> - monitoring the procedure of acquisition properly speaking (rhythm, time, place, etc)
> - evaluating what has been acquired.

Furthermore, Holec (1981, 4) concludes that "the autonomous learner is himself capable of making all these decisions concerning the learning with which he is or wishes to be involved".

Although learner autonomy as defined by Holec (1981) and learner empowerment as defined in this thesis share many traits, empowerment does not mean that students should manage all on their own, totally autonomously. Instead, students take charge of their learning with the support and assistance of their teacher and peers, for instance (cf. e.g. Cochran 1988; Simon 1994). Moreover, students are not expected to have the sole responsibility for all the decisions concerning their learning (cf. Holec 1981, 4).

In the process of empowerment, power and resources are not regarded as finite and, therefore, *learner empowerment does not mean teacher disempowerment:* even though the teacher's role as well as the decision-making structures in the classroom may change considerably, power and resources which students assume are not taken away from teachers. Instead, power and resources should be something that students and teachers share and that contribute to the empowerment, the growth of power and resources, of both parties (see e.g. Hiemstra & Sisco 1990; Cummins 1996; cf. also Little 1991, 1995). Cummins phrases his view on empowerment as a collaborative process as follows:

> Collaborative relations of power, on the other hand, operate on the assumption that power is not a fixed pre-determined quantity but rather can be *generated* in interpersonal and intergroup relations. In other words, participants in the relationship are *empowered* through their collaboration such that each is more affirmed in her or his identity and has a greater sense of efficacy to create change in his or her life or social situation. Thus, power is created in the relationship and shared among participants. The power relationship is *additive* rather than *subtractive*. Power is *created with* others rather than being *imposed on or exercised over* others. (Cummins 1996, 15; emphasis original.)

Furthermore, empowerment is considered a process with different aspects and degrees (see e.g. Cochran 1988; Karl 1995). Therefore, negotiation between learners and teachers is considered central in fostering and supporting the process of empowerment. Negotiation may be needed, for instance, in defining students' individual learning goals in respect to general, overall goals and students' individual learning needs, goals and interests. Some students' may also need help in finding learning methods and topics which suit them. In addition, some students may find control over, and responsibility for, their own learning too demanding a change: a gradual release of responsibility (see e.g. Pearson & Fielding 1991; Linnakylä 1994) from the teacher to the students may be required. Negotiation is thus a process of sharing both power, resources and responsibility. Ideally, the processes are individual and based on learners' readiness, needs and wishes in the framework of the given context. As Cummins puts it:

> Within this framework, empowerment can be defined as the collaborative creation of power. Students whose schooling experiences reflect collaborative relations of power develop the ability, confidence and motivation to succeed academically. They participate competently in instruction as a result of having developed a secure sense of identity and the knowledge that their voices will be heard and respected within the classroom. They feel a sense of ownership for the learning that goes on in the classroom and a sense that they belong in the classroom learning community. (Cummins 1996, 15.)

## Lingual empowerment

> The importance of learner autonomy is sometimes explained in terms of a positive relation between present and future learning. Learners who accept responsibility for their learning are more likely to achieve their learning targets; and if they achieve their learning targets, they are more likely to maintain a positive attitude to learning in the future. I accept this argument as far as it goes, but it seems to me to be only part of the story. For in the case of language learning the whole point of developing learner autonomy is to enable learners to become autonomous users of their target language. (Little 1995, 176.)

As mentioned earlier, learner empowerment and lingual empowerment partly overlap. Lingual empowerment relates to the third aspect of learner empowerment, namely, students taking charge and ownership of their learning and skills. In language learning, learner empowerment is thus believed to support and perhaps even feed into lingual empowerment. To illustrate that, I quote Eriksson (1993, 68):

> Learners who choose to study topics which they themselves are interested in may have something genuinely interesting to tell their peers, and probably they will also be motivated to do so in as good language as possible.

Eriksson (1993, 51), for his part, quotes Dewey (1956, 56) to substantiate his own words: "There is all the difference in the world between having to say something and having something to say". Consequently, and in sum, lingual empowerment refers to students' ownership of their language knowledge and skills. In other words, lingual empowerment means that students take charge of their own ability to communicate,[4] to use the English language for different purposes and functions and also in different contexts which they regard as relevant for them.

Although lingual empowerment is a term coined for the purposes of the present study, it has undoubtedly had some predecessors. For instance, MacIntyre and Clément (1996) have studied *willingness to communicate* in a second language in bilingual settings in Canada. MacIntyre and Clément (1996, 1) define the term, which they originally attribute to McCroskey and Baer's (1985) but also to Burgoon's (1976) work, as follows:

> Willingness to communicate can be defined as the tendency for an individual to initiate conversation when free to choose to do so.

The first studies dealt with willingness to communicate in a native language, but later on, studies have extended to second language contexts (MacIntyre and Clément 1996, 2). MacIntyre and Clément (1996) see links between willingness to communicate and perceived communication competence, communication anxiety, frequency of communication, integrative motivation, and attitude towards the learning situation, for instance. Although willingness to communicate "also represents a student's preparedness to seek out second language communication opportunities" (MacIntyre and Clément 1996, 1), the notion of willingness to communicate is limited to oral communication in a second language. Lingual empowerment, on the other hand, refers to all modes of language use, both oral and written, both receptive and productive. Therefore, lingual empowerment represents language learners' preparedness to use their language skills in any of these modes in situations which they feel to be appropriate for and relevant to themselves:

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[4] *To communicate* means here both receptive and productive use of language, either in written or oral mode. As Hymes (1992, 39) says: "Any use of language involves the attribute of communication".

> This confidence to use the target language in a personally appropriate way is a necessary precondition for, but also the outcome of, the kind of communicative activity that gradually but ineluctably promotes second language development. (Little 1995, 17.)

Lingual empowerment may, naturally, entail improved language knowledge and skills, i.e. cognitive aspects, but, moreover, it entails students' volition, courage and readiness – both cognitive and affective – to use their own language skills, 'the English they have', actively. In this respect, lingual empowerment is heavily influenced by features that Dörnyei (1994a, 1994b) calls *linguistic self-confidence* in his expanded model of language learning motivation. These features are, for instance, the students' language use anxiety, their perceived language competence, self-efficacy as well as causal attributions (Dörnyei 1994a, 1994b).

In sum, lingual empowerment could perhaps be summarized, in Bachman's (1990, 105) words, as language learners' "willingness to exploit what they know". Willingness and courage to use the language and to communicate is therefore considered here not only as a vital part of lingual empowerment but also a vital part of language use: what is the use of any language knowledge and skills, of any competence, if the learner does not dare or want to use the language?

## Lingual empowerment and language proficiency

Taking charge and ownership of one's language skills or language proficiency may also encompass redefining one's notions of language proficiency or communicative competence.[5] For instance, learners who regard language proficiency as mastery of language form may be error-centred and, to avoid mistakes, they may avoid using the language in situations where they are not certain of how to express something in a correct and accurate way. In contrast, students who regard language proficiency as communication of meaning through language may not pay so much attention to accuracy, or inaccuracy, of language but try to communicate even though they know that the language they produce is not faultless. Moreover, the nature of the conception of language proficiency has a significant impact on second or foreign language education and its emphases and methodologies (Harley et al. 1990, 7), which, naturally, have a great of influence on learners and their learning.

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[5] Even though the possible distinction between the terms language proficiency and communicative competence is a matter of strong disagreement among prominent second or foreign language experts (see e.g. McNamara 1996, 44–49), the terms language ability, language proficiency and communicative competence are used interchangeably in this thesis.

Language proficiency is often regarded as knowledge of a language, for instance its structures, vocabulary and functions. Sometimes the notions of language proficiency or ability are very formalistic dealing with language as a form, sometimes they are more functional and consider language a means to perform different functions. Nevertheless, even the more functional definitions of language proficiency or communicative competence tend to focus on competencies, in other words, on cognitive aspects, as the following quotations will also illustrate:

> Several examples will serve to illustrate the point that the conceptualization of the nature of language proficiency has a major impact on a variety of practical and policy issues in education. In the area of language teaching methodology, for example, the predominant emphasis until recently has been on the teaching of grammar. The implicit conception of language proficiency, as it has been operationalized in second language classrooms, has entailed viewing proficiency as little more than grammar and lexis. The recent movement toward communicative language teaching has been associated with a broader view of language that includes not just its grammatical aspects, but also the ability to use language appropriately in different concexts and the ability to organize one's thoughts through language. This is to say, the recent emphasis on communication in language teaching is expressed in attempts to develop students' sociolinguistic and discourse competencies in addition to their grammatical competence. (Harley et al. 1990, 7–8.)

> It seems as least possible that communicative competence is best viewed as consisting of two kinds of competence – grammatical and pragmatic – and that sociolinguistic phenomena interact with these two components at all levels. (Schachter 1990, 44.)

Thus, apart from Hymes's (1972, 1989) *ability for use* as part of his model of communicative competence, in most models of second language communicative ability, the affective and volitional aspects are not really dealt with (McNamara 1995; 1996, 50–72). Nevertheless, some bilingual proficiency models (see e.g. Gardner and Lambert 1972; Schumann 1978; Brown 1986) have discussed the role of attitude, orientation or motivation in second language acquisition (see also Bourhis 1990, 138–145). These models, however, have mainly dealt with volitional and affective factors in terms of integrative orientation or acculturation, i.e. in terms of learners' willingness to integrate, assimilate or identify with the target language group. Furthermore, as models of bilingual proficiency, they primarily discuss second language acquisition in second language environments.

As McNamara (1996, 68–72) points out, Bachman and Palmer (1996), however, bring the role of non-cognitive factors in language use into systematic discussion about language proficiency by introducing *affective schemata* in their amended model of language use. Bachman and Palmer (1996, 65) define affective schemata and also explain their importance in language use as follows:

> Affective schemata can be thought of as the affective or emotional correlates of topical knowledge. These affective schemata provide the basis on which language users assess, consciously or unconsciously, the characteristics of the language use task and its setting in terms of past emotional experiences in similar contexts. The affective schemata, in combination with the characteristics of the particular task, determine, to a large extent, the language user's affective response to the task, and can either facilitate or limit the flexibility with which he responds in a given context. The affective responses of language users may thus influence not only whether they even attempt to use language in a given situation, but also how flexible they are in adapting their language use to variations in the setting.

According to McNamara (1996, 71), this is a significant inclusion into the definitions of communicative competence or ability:

> For the first time, an attempt has been made to deal explicitly in a model of second language communicative ability with the aspect of Hymes's 'ability for use' which relates to affective or volitional factors.

However, as McNamara (1995; 1996, 66) also points out, Bachman (1990, 105) has already mentioned volitional factors in his discussion of *strategic competence* by saying that language users "differ in their willingness to exploit what they know and their flexibility in doing so".

Even though the inclusion of affective and volitional factors in a model of communicative competence can be seen to be not only appropriate but inevitable at an everyday level, their inclusion may cause problems in communicative language testing, for instance (McNamara 1996, 80–81). Moreover, in language testing as well as in assessment carried out in language classrooms, the relation between formal accuracy and the communication of meaning has often proved difficult:

> In discussion of communicative approaches to language teaching the point has often been made that formal accuracy alone is an insufficient measure of learner achievement. Successful autonomy projects underline this point, demonstrating again and again that fossilized errors are no barrier to effective language use, even at very advanced levels. Regrettably, public and institutional examinations mostly pay no more than lip service to this truth. (Little 1995, 179.)

In foreign language education in a school context, however, the problems that the inclusion of affective and volitional factors may pose on language testing should not be a major concern. According to the main premises of functional language teaching, students should learn languages for communication in real life situations that are relevant for them, not for test situations. Hence, if it is believed that affective and volitional factors play an important role in the learning or acquisition of a language, these factors should not be left unconsidered when trying to foster students' ability and willingness to communicate in a foreign language in and outside the classroom. In consequence, compared to most definitions of language proficiency or communicative competence, the term lingual empowerment attemps to pay more attention to volitional and affective factors of language use without, however, ignoring the cognitive domains.

CHAPTER 3

# The methodology of the present study

## The present study as a qualitative case study

Generally speaking, the present study can be regarded as a qualitative case study. Qualitative case study focusses on some present phenomenon in its real, *natural context* (Syrjälä & Numminen 1988, 7; Bogdan & Biklen 1992, 29–30). Case study is a *holistic* and systematic description of the phenomenon from different perspectives in order to understand the phenomenon as a whole (e.g. Syrjälä & Numminen 1988, 8; Patton 1990, 49–52). Therefore, the researcher is interested in the *participants' perspectives*, their opinions, experiences and interpretations of reality (Syrjälä & Numminen 1988, 9; Tynjälä 1991; Bogdan & Biklen 1992, 32). As the participants and the researcher are in *interaction* with each other, the roles of the researcher and subjects are not clear-cut (Syrjälä & Numminen 1988, 11). Case study is also *eclectic and flexible*: the researcher selects and integrates methods and approaches ecletically from different methodologies and theoretical backgrounds in order to get information about the phenomenon. Furthermore, case study is *heuristic* and it should enable both the researcher's and readers' *induction*. Therefore, a case study report should describe the research process in detail as well as present enough authentic data to allow the readers to evaluate both the credibility of the research and its results and to induce their own interpretations and meanings. (Syrjälä et al. 1994, 16–18; see also Grönfors 1982, 179–187; Mäkelä 1990.) In sum, "qualitative case study focusses rather on *the process* than the product, on *the whole context* and not on isolated, individual factors, and on *new insights and understanding* rather than verifying views and hypotheses based on earlier studies" (Syrjälä et al. 1994, 13; emphasis original).

As a qualitative case study, the present study is rather eclectic since it exhibits features of various case study types. Furthermore, different phases of the study and also different parts of the present report can be considered to be of different categories.

The research process as a whole has many features of action research (see e.g. Carr & Kemmis 1986, Kemmis & McTaggart 1988). Firstly, the study aimed at developing both practice and its context and at developing and improving the practitioners' understanding of the practice. Secondly, the research process progressed in spiral cycles. Furthermore, the cycles comprised the phases of planning, acting, observing and reflecting and fed into new cycles of revised action and research. Thirdly, the study was collaborative and involved the participants, both the teachers, students and myself,[6] as active agents of the practice. The teachers participated in the study out of their own free will and interest and, thus, the principle of informed consent, "the voluntary consent of the individual to participate in research" (Burgess 1989, 6) was completely fulfilled for their part. Accordingly, the study met the three minimal requirements set for action research by Carr and Kemmis (1986):

> Firstly, a project takes as its subject-matter a social practice, regarding it as a form of strategic action susceptible of improvement; secondly, the project proceeds through a spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, with each of these activities being systematically and self-critically implemented and interrelated; thirdly, the project involves those responsible for the practice in each of the moments of the activity, widening participation in the project gradually to include others affected by the practice, and maintaining collaborative control of the process. (Carr & Kemmis 1986, 165–166.)

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[6] Even though many writing manuals favour the use of the passive voice in a research report, I shall use the pronoun *I* when I refer to myself and *we* when I refer to the teachers and myself. As action research, the study required both the teachers, students and my active involvement: why, then, hide behind the passive voice? As Grönfors says (1982, 6): "Many researchers prefer the passive voice when reporting their research result. But if we accept the idea that the researcher himself or herself is the most important tool of qualitative research, it is methodologically wrong if the researcher talks about himself or herself as if he or she was a third person."

Furthermore, the present study met the requirement of more than one cycle of action and research (see e.g. Carr & Kemmis 1986, Elliott 1991). Epistemologically, through an eclectic approach, the present study also attempts to relate retrospective reflection and prospective action (see Carr & Kemmis 1986, 186).

Furthermore, attempting to foster students' empowerment, the study shares some features and goals of emancipatory action research, which aims at empowering its participants. Emancipatory action research, stemming from the idea of emancipatory knowledge by Jürgen Habermas (see e.g. 1973), can be considered "a process of enlightenment" (Tesch 1990, 66) "by which participants in the situation reach authentic understanding of their situation" (Carr & Kemmis 1986, 158). Accordingly, emancipatory action research aims at "liberation that permits actors to make choices without ideological constraints" (Tesch 1990, 66). The present study aimed at allowing students to make their own choices and also to voice their own opinions of the experiment and its effects on their studying and learning. In accordance, the methodology of the study is participatory and, moreover, the data of the present study rely heavily on the students' own comments of their experiences (cf. e.g. Syrjälä & Numminen 1988, 9; Syrjälä et al. 1994, 13).

However, the study did not perhaps meet all the requirements set for action research. First of all, the study was not initiated by a problem or issue encountered in the participating groups. Rather, it was initiated by an interest in developing portfolios in foreign language education. This interest became gradually more specific and was very likely influenced by some problems or issues encountered in the classroom. Thus, during the actual experiment, the initial interest could be considered, if not a problem, at least a question: could portfolios foster students' empowerment in foreign language learning? Secondly, I did not officially teach any of the participating groups and therefore, strictly speaking, did not study my own teaching practices. I was, nonetheless, involved in the study also in the classroom. Furthermore, my own background as a teacher naturally influenced my perceptions and experiences during the study, and now that I have returned to teaching, the study has also influenced my own teaching practices.

The study has also some features of evaluation case study, and more specifically, of illuminative evaluation. Illuminative evaluations usually aim at describing and interpreting an innovation rather than measuring it. Also, illuminative evaluations seek to find out how different participants experience the innovations and their effects as well as to analyse whether innovations influence students knowledge, skills or experiences. (Syrjälä & Numminen 1988, 45; see also Patton 1990, 119.)

Along the same lines of thought, one of the aims of the present study was to introduce portfolios into foreign language education as an innovation that could bring something new into foreign language education. Accordingly, the practical questions of how it could be adapted, applied and developed in the given context were of great interest, as was the question of how the students and teachers would experience the portfolio approach and its process. Thus, particularly the description of the actual portfolio processes in the classrooms could be regarded as an illuminative case evaluation. Therefore, Part II, the Portfolio programme, gives a detailed account of what happened in the classrooms, what kind of problems were encountered, and how we attempted to solve those problems: the readers can see for themselves what is was like to participate in the innovation (cf. Syrjälä et al. 1994, 16–18; see also Grönfors 1982, 179–187; Mäkelä 1990; Patton 1990, 429–430.)

The primary goal of the present study was to see whether portfolios could foster students' empowerment. Both portfolio profiles and portraits attempt to describe and analyse how the portfolio programme influenced the students' learner empowerment and lingual empowerment. Thus, the study attempts to evaluate and illuminate whether the portfolio programme could foster students' empowerment in the given context.

The more detailed analysis of portfolios, the portfolio portraits, also aimed at portraying and understanding holistically and thoroughly how different individuals experienced the portfolio process. Accordingly, portfolio portraits have some features of biographical or, rather, narrative case studies (see e.g. Syrjälä & Numminen 1988, 65–76), even though the portrayals are limited to a short period of time and thus are not comparable with purely biographical, longitudinal studies.

## The participants

The portfolio courses were carried out in two schools in Jyväskylä, the Teacher Training School of the University of Jyväskylä and Kesy Upper Secondary

School (Kesyn lukio) in the spring term of 1994. Three teachers of English, Mervi Eloranta and Pirjo Väänänen from the Teacher Training School and Päivi Ahlroos from Kesy, participated in the study with one or two of their second-year-student groups. The pilot group consisted of eight students, and the actual portfolio experiments started out with 108 students. Out of the 108 students, 58 were girls and 50 boys.

The Teacher Training School was an obvious choice for the portfolio programme. First, I had worked there for three years prior to the experiment (1990–1993) and I knew the school, the teachers and most of the students. It was vital that the participating teachers were truly willing to participate because the portfolio programme required a great deal of their work and their close co-operation with me. Therefore, it was natural to seek co-operation with my former colleagues whom I knew well both professionally and personally. Secondly, the Teacher Training School also enabled me to participate in the experiment in a dual role of a teacher-researcher: although I did not teach any of the participating groups any more, I was more or less considered a second teacher in the Teacher Training School groups, in particular the pilot group and one of the two actual groups, since I had taught both of these groups for two years before the experiment (1991–1993).

Since one sometimes hears claims that teaching in a Teacher Training School is very different from 'ordinary' schools because of their smaller class sizes or 'better' student population and that innovations that might work in smaller groups of Teacher Training Schools would not be feasible in ordinary schools, we wanted to try out portfolios also in an 'ordinary' school setting. Päivi Ahlroos, who had recently started teaching English at Kesy Upper Secondary School and who had also formerly worked at the Teacher Training School as my colleague, expressed her interest and joined in the study.

The participating groups varied considerably in size, from eight to 38 students. The pilot group of eight students studied English as their C-language[7] under Pirjo Väänänen's tuition in the Teacher Training School. The pilot group thus differed from the actual study participants in the amount of their earlier

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[7] C-language used to refer to students' third foreign language started in the 8th grade (nowadays B2). The pilot group students' first foreign language was German and their second foreign language was Swedish.

English studies. Nevertheless, the C-English group was the only culture course group that had their course number 6 scheduled before the other participating groups: in other words, the C-English group started their culture course in February while the other groups were to start in April. Thus, if we wanted to test and improve the portfolio framework before introducing it to more than 100 students, we had to choose this group.

Both Mervi Eloranta and Pirjo Väänänen from the Teacher Training School had only one second-year A-English (English as the first foreign language) group each. Their groups consisted of 22 and 18 students respectively.

Päivi Ahlroos from Kesy participated in the study with two large groups of 30 and 38 students and, furthermore, both groups had their portfolio course in the same period. Therefore, her work load was hypothesized to be by far the greatest. The decision to experiment with groups of different sizes as well as with one teacher having a great number of students at the same time was, however, deliberate: we wanted to test whether the class size and the number of students or groups would have an effect on the introduction and implementation of the portfolio approach.

## My role in the portfolio programme

My role in the programme was rather varied. The initial idea of the portfolio experiment in the context of the culture course as well as the original blueprint for the framework were originated by me.[8] I also provided the teachers with some information and articles about portfolios in general and about earlier portfolio experiments. Then we developed the framework for the portfolio course collaboratively. Therefore, initially my role could be regarded as an 'instigator' and consultant.

During the actual portfolio courses my role remained rather varied. Basically, I was the researcher in charge of the study, but because of my background as an English teacher, I considered myself also a teacher. The participating teachers seemed to regard me as their colleague and consulting co-worker, a teacher-researcher, and most of the decisions made during the portfolio courses were agreed on jointly.

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[8] Although the portfolio experiment in the Teacher Training School of Oulu had started a year earlier in the context of the culture course (see Kauppinen et al. 1994), I was not aware of their experiment until in April 1994 when we had already started our portfolio experiments with all groups.

In different classrooms my role also varied. In the Teacher Training School, the students seemed to consider me another teacher. Especially my two former groups regarded me as their teacher and did not seem to make any difference between their actual teacher, Pirjo Väänänen, and me. Since I also wanted to take part in the classroom work in a hands-on way in order to be able to observe and experience the whole process from a teacher's and a researcher's perspective, I participated in all of their portfolio lessons. When they had a grammar or language laboratory lesson, or a lesson given by a teacher trainee, I was not usually present. Because of my somewhat constant presence and my being their former English teacher, my role in these two groups could perhaps be classified as an observing participant rather than a participating observer. In Mervi Eloranta's group students seemed to consider me a resource teacher who simultaneously conducted research. There my role could perhaps be characterized mainly as a participant observer.

In Kesy, I was regarded more as an external researcher: one student called me 'the inspector' in his log book – whether the choice of word was influenced by my surname, his view of me as an external observer, or by an inaccurate translation for a researcher, I do not know. Nevertheless, in the Kesy groups I was, at best, a participant observer who came in occasionally. Students asked for my advice and gave me their work to read when I attended their lessons but, nevertheless, although probably not unwelcome, I remained an outsider who was responsible for the portfolio approach: another student named me the 'mother of portfolios' in his log.

## The action research process

As action research, the study in its entirety included several phases. The first impulse for the present study was my new job as a researcher at the Institute for Educational Research. Getting information about various purposes of portfolios and about different portfolio experiments gave both theoretical background and practical ideas for the present study. Students' empowerment and ownership of their own learning through portfolios began to interest me more than, for instance, developing portfolios for large-scale assessment purposes.

Choosing the culture course as the setting of the experiment was based on the feeling that culture as a topic area could interest many students and, thus, could provide a fruitful basis for students' individual work. Furthermore, second-year upper secondary school students were considered generally proficient enough to carry out more extensive projects of their own (cf. e.g. Clark 1987). Later on, the *Framework curriculum for the senior secondary school* (1994, 63–64) 'legitimized' the choice by suggesting oral and written projects based on students' individual interests in the different areas of culture as the syllabus for the culture course.

In the autumn of 1993 I made the first plans for the portfolio framework and discussed the portfolio approach with the teachers who would later on participate in the experiment. The teachers also took part in some portfolio training provided by the Institute for Educational Research.

I continued to acquire further information on, and insight into, portfolio assessment through literature and also through lectures, seminars and visits. In November 1993 I visited four American schools that took part in the portfolio research project of the State University of New York at Albany and, furthermore, I attented the annual convention of the National Council of Teachers of English in Pittsburgh, where portfolios were widely discussed. During the autumn and winter, the co-operation with the participating teachers continued, and the framework for the portfolio course was developed.

In February 1994 the pilot group started the portfolio course. Experimenting with portfolios in practice and discussing the process both with the teacher and the students helped to mould the framework for the actual programme. We also discussed the experiences and possible needs for change with the other two teachers who were to join in in April.

In April 1994 the other groups started their portfolio courses. The experiences were constantly reflected on and refined in the case of problems or needs for change. The process involved close co-operation: both the teachers and I shared our experiences, problems and ideas trying to find solutions or new approaches together. While supporting and helping each other both personally and professionally (see Pollari et al. 1996), the teachers also gave me vital information about the portfolio processes in their groups and about how they experienced the processes. Furthermore, as explained above, I was actively present, participating and observing at the same time, in one of the groups during all their portfolio lessons and class conferences. In addition to all the introductory lessons and final portfolio celebrations, I visited the other groups occasionally.

The experimental phase was also the time for gathering data. In addition to both the teachers' and my experiences and observations, data were collected through questionnaires, which were filled in both at the beginning and at the end of the course. Furthermore, some students were interviewed at the end of the course, and all portfolio celebrations were videotaped. The most important source of data was naturally the students' portfolios, all of which were photocopied for later analysis. Some pieces of work were also photographed.

After the experiments the co-operation between the teachers and myself continued. Some of the portfolios were jointly assessed, and the experiences were discussed and reflected on on several occasions. Putting research in action through dissemination of experiences and results – one of Nunan's (1992, 18–19) action research steps – the experiment was also reported in the form of lectures and articles after the initial analysis of the data. At the same time, the analysis of the data continued. One of the teachers started a new portfolio culture course in the autumn of 1994. In December 1994 the students were asked to write 'post-epilogues', their final comments on the portfolio approach, whose purpose was to indicate whether their opinions about the portfolio experiment had changed in the course of time. Unfortunately, some students never handed in their final comments or they wrote the comments anonymously, which meant that some post-epilogues were difficult or impossible to match with the students' earlier comments.

The analysis of the data continued and evolved all the time, resulting finally in the present study. (For further information about the analysis of the data, see Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 in Part III.) Meanwhile, as I had returned to teaching, the experiment resulted in new portfolio adaptations also in my own teaching practice. Moreover, I feel that the portfolio study has clearly influenced my teaching.

The action research process with its cycles and phases of planning, action, evaluation and revision of plans are described in Table 2. However, in reality the phases were intertwined and, therefore, not as separate as in the following table:

*Table 2.* *The action research process of the present study.*

| | |
|---|---|
| FIRST CYCLE: | **August 1993 – April 1994** |
| **Planning:** | portfolio literature, courses, school visits, etc.<br>first plans of the portfolio framework<br>co-operation with teachers to develop framework |
| **Acting:** | portfolio course with the pilot group (from February to April 1994) |
| **Observing:** | observing the pilot experiment, collecting data |
| **Reflecting:** | analysis of the data and experiences,<br>needs for change reflected and discussed |
| SECOND CYCLE: | **starting in April 1994** |
| **Planning:** | revised framework |
| **Acting:** | portfolio courses started in April 1994 |
| **Observing:** | observing portfolio courses, gathering data |
| **Reflecting:** | first analysis of data<br>reporting on the experiences<br>> (new portfolio adaptations) |
| THIRD CYCLE: | |
| **Reflecting & Planning:** | analysis of the data continued and evolved<br>further information on portfolios: seminars, conferences, articles, etc. |
| Acting: | dissemination of our portfolio experiences<br>new portfolio adaptations |
| **Observing:** | collecting further data and experiences |
| **Reflecting:** | the final report of the portfolio study |
| FOURTH AND FIFTH CYCLE: | new cycles of two portfolio culture courses in the spring and autumn of 1997 |

## The research questions

The first and foremost research interest for this study was *whether portfolios could foster the students' empowerment in the context of the present study*. However, because of the dual nature of the present study as a case study consisting of both an illuminative evaluation of an innovation and a detailed analysis of different portfolio cases, the actual research questions are also twofold.

The main questions of interest for the illuminative evaluation of the portfolio process, i.e. Part II, are as follows:

(1) How did the portfolio programme proceed and progress?
    How and by what was it influenced?
    How did the participants experience the programme, its different features and why?
    What were considered its advantages and disadvantages by the participants? Why?

(2) From the empowerment perspective, what were the most important and critical features of the process?

Naturally, the main interest of the whole study, namely whether portfolios could foster the students' empowerment, will prevail also through the illuminative evaluation.

Part III, Portfolio profiles and portraits, deals with the students' different processes of empowerment through their different portfolio processes. Particularly Portfolio portraits, i.e. the detailed analyses of some portfolio cases, attempt to answer the following research questions, which focus on students' learner empowerment – their taking charge of their work and learning – and its effects both on their learning experiences and on their lingual empowerment:

(1) How did the students' processes of creating their portfolios and their actual portfolios differ from each other?
        How did students make their choices; set their goals, define their criteria, choose their topics, etc.?

(2) In students' opinion, did their active role in, and control of, the learning process have an influence on their learning experiences?
        If yes, how? Why?

(3) Did the students' active and responsible learner role and their learning experiences influence the students' 'lingual empowerment'?

- Did they influence the students' motivation and self-concept as language learners?
- Did they have an effect on the students' active use of the English language?
- Are students more willing or ready to use English for the tasks and purposes and at the level that they can define themselves?
- Did the students see any changes in their language skills or language proficiency?
  - How did the students see their own competence in English?
  - How did they define language proficiency in general?

# Part II

# The Portfolio Programme

CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

The actual process of carrying out the portfolio course was very much alike in all the participating groups. Moreover, they all had a similar framework, which outlined the basic requirements for the portfolios. First, the students were to compile four or five different pieces of work in their *working portfolios*, and then, at the end of the course, they were to select and assess two or three pieces for their *final showcase portfolios*. The showcase portfolios were then presented and celebrated in the class. Afterwards they were evaluated by the teacher and the students' course grades were based on that assessment. There were no other tests or examinations during this course.

This section of the present study follows the portfolio process as it was carried out in the classrooms from start to finish. As an illuminative evaluation, this description of the process attempts to provide such a "concrete, alive and detailed description" (Syrjälä & Numminen 1988, 8) that the reader could both "enter into the situation and thoughts of people represented in the report" (Patton 1990, 430) and evaluate the credibility of the study and its results. Therefore, the account offers a great deal of authentic student comments in their original, unedited version.

Partlett and Hamilton (1976, 144, as quoted by Patton 1990, 119) characterize illuminative evaluation and its aims as follows:

> The aims of illuminative evaluation are to study the innovative program: how it operates; how it is influenced by the various school situations in which it is applied; what those directly concerned regard as its advantages and disadvantages; and how students' intellectual tasks and academic experiences are most affected. It aims to discov-

> er and document what it is like to be participating in the scheme, whether as a teacher or pupil, and, in addition, to discern and discuss the innovation's most significant features, recurring, concomitant, and critical processes. In short, it seeks to address and to illuminate a complex array of questions.

Accordingly, the main purpose of this section is to study the portfolio programme: how it functioned and progressed, by what and how it was influenced; how both the students and teachers experienced it and what were regarded as its advantages and disadvantages. Thus, in addition to describing the process, this section aims at discussing the most significant features of the innovation. The major issues and problems of the portfolio course are, naturally, addressed in the description of the portfolio process in the classrooms (Chapter 3) because they strongly affected the process, but some of them will also be rediscussed in a more thorough way in the evaluation of the programme (Chapter 4). Furthermore, possible revisions and suggestions for later portfolio programmes will be suggested in Chapter 4. Moreover, the students' reflections on the effects of the portfolio approach will be discussed there.

The main interest of the whole study, namely whether portfolios could foster the students' empowerment, prevails all through the description. Therefore, the main questions of interest for this illuminative evaluation are as follows:

(1) How did the portfolio programme proceed and progress?
How and by what was it influenced?
How did the participants experience the programme, its different features and why?
What were considered its advantages and disadvantages by the participants? Why?

(2) From the empowerment perspective, what were the most important and critical features of the process?

However, why the culture course was chosen as the context of the portfolio programme and how culture was defined as its topic area will be discussed first in Chapter 2.

## CHAPTER 2

# The culture course as the context for the portfolio programme

The decision to try out portfolios in the context of the culture course was based on the idea that this particular course could provide an interesting and fruitful basis for portfolios. First of all, portfolios as a learning and assessment tool seem to suit better courses that allow freedom of choice also in their topic area: if the contents of a course are strictly defined, and there are many compulsory topics to cover, students' own choices are naturally more restricted. Secondly, in addition to the freedom of choice it could allow, culture as a topic area was considered to provide an interesting basis for the students' portfolios fostering their cultural interests, knowledge and understanding. Cultural knowledge, interests and understanding are major objectives of Finnish foreign language teaching (see *Framework curriculum for senior secondary school* 1994, 70–72). Thirdly, despite considerable individual differences among the students, the average proficiency level at this stage, a year before taking their matriculation examinations[1] , is usually quite high. Thus, the studying could more easily focus on experimental use of the language and more demanding communicative tasks (cf. Clark 1987). Furthermore, students at that age have quite a lot of prior knowledge, skills, experiences and interests to build upon, and they also are perhaps more mature and ready for this kind of innovation demanding adequate self-direction and study skills.

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[1] At the time of the present portfolio experiment, both the Teacher Training School and Kesy had a graded upper secondary school system.

Even though the idea of experimenting with portfolios in the framework of the culture course was decided before the *Framework curriculum for senior secondary school* or its drafts were made public, the student-centred approach is also clearly acknowledged in the *Framework curriculum for senior secondary school* (1994, 74) where the aims and syllabus of the culture course are defined as follows:

> Students concentrate on self-directed oral and written work. The types of activities are chosen according to students' interests and preferences, and carried out, for example, as projects. The topics may include, for example, the arts, literature, music, film, and the theatre.

To illustrate both the cultural and language objectives of the portfolio programme, Kohonen's analogy of orienteering with the help of a map lends itself to the present study. Kohonen (1992, 79) compares language learning task awareness with a map:

> The learner's awareness of the language learning task can be seen as a map of the task. To use a familiar analogy of orienteering, this knowledge can be compared with a topographic map of the terrain. To be able to use the map one has to possess a sufficient knowledge of the topographic symbols and be able to match the map with the surrounding terrain. Equipped with such a map, the necessary literacy and a compass, it is safe to explore and enjoy an unknown terrain and find one's way properly.

Adapting Kohonen's imagery, the aim of this culture-oriented portfolio programme was to give the students a map and some basic information as well as guidance and help, and then let them explore and find their way in the world of culture according to their own interests, likings and goals.

I shall next briefly discuss some of the many definitions of culture presented in foreign or second language education literature. Furthermore, I shall discuss how the *Framework curriculum for the senior secondary school* (1994) defines culture and its role in foreign language education as well as how culture was defined as the topic area of the portfolio programme.

## Some definitions of culture in second or foreign language education

In literature dealing with modern foreign and second language education, culture seems to be unanimously considered an important and quite inseparable part of language proficiency and, therefore, also as an inseparable part of language learning and teaching. However, the definitions of culture vary.

Earlier, the term culture was generally considered to mean history, geography, institutions, arts, music, drama and literature; in addition, great accomplishments of science and sports as well as outstanding individuals in that society were usually considered part of culture (see e.g. Stern 1992). Thus, the traditional definition focussed mainly on cultural accomplishments and institutions. Later, particularly after World War II, growth in social sciences, especially in anthropology and sociology, led to a different emphasis and a broader definition of culture (Stern 1992).

In accordance with the broader definition, Lado (1957, 110--111) defines culture as being "synonymous with the ways of a people" and, thus, cultures as "structured systems of patterned behavior". Rivers (1981, 316) agrees with him and says that the culture of a people "refers to all aspects of shared life in community", including, for instance, social systems, institutions, values and customs, but also attitudes, reactions and unspoken assumptions. Along the same lines, Brown (1987) also defines culture in its broad sense and emphasizes the social and collective nature of culture:

> Culture is a way of life. Culture is the context within which we exist, think, feel, and relate to others. It is the "glue" that binds a group of people together. John Donne wrote:"No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main" (Devotions, XVII). Culture is our continent, the collective identity of which each of us is a part. (Brown 1987, 122.)

Some writers have, however, tried to break the broad definition of culture into categories or topic areas that could serve as a guideline for teaching culture in foreign or second language studies. Some writers give broader classifications with a few categories. However, some lists include dozens of topics ranging from friendly exhanges to flowers and gardens, and from folklore to family meals (Brooks 1964, 90–95); or from typical student activities to the economic system, and from good manners to women's liberation (Chastain 1976, 389–392).

Even though the traditional and the way-of-life approaches can be seen as two historical stages in the definition of the concept of culture (Stern 1992), they both still remain. For instance, Hammerly (1982, 513–515) has introduced a threefold classification, which combines both traditional and anthropological way-of-life definitions of culture. According to him, "for languistic purposes", culture can be divided into informational (or factual), behavioural and achievement (or accomplishment) cultures. Accordingly, albeit the way-of-life approach to culture has been increasingly emphasized in foreign language teaching theory since the 1950s, the traditional approach has also been considered legitimate, at least when it is part of broader culture teaching. The traditional concept of culture is sometimes referred to as "Culture with a capital C", while the way-of-life culture is called "culture with a small c". (Stern 1992, 208; cf. Seelye 1988; Chastain 1976.) Brooks (1964) calls these two approaches 'formal culture' and 'deep culture' respectively.

All in all, although the definitions and classifications are numerous and diverse, most writers agree on defining culture in its broader sense and including the traditional concept of culture in the broader definition as its part. Interestingly, however, the traditional concept of culture seems very often to represent achievements of adult culture or high culture and not so much those of popular culture or youth culture, even though most language learners, at least in a school environment, are children or adolescents.

## Culture as defined in the *Framework curriculum for the senior secondary school*

The *Framework surriculum for the senior secondary school* (1994, 70) mentions culture as a central aspect in foreign language education:

> As language and culture are closely linked, foreign languages give students valuable cultural capital. They widen the students' world view and strengthen their cultural identity. The subject gives students readiness to participate in international cooperation and act in international work environments.

Furthermore, cultural aspects are emphasized in the general objectives for the teaching of foreign languages (see *Framework curriculum for the senior secondary school* 1994, 70–72):

- the students should be able to acquire information and to add to their knowledge about the target language countries, people(s), and cultures and to relate to different cultures and people without prejudice
- the students should become interested in foreign languages and cultures
- they should be able to communicate in ways that are typical of the target language and its culture

Cultural awareness and understanding are thus considered an important part of language education. Accordingly, the language should be taught as an instrument for social interaction. Furthermore, the students should learn to analyse and compare their own culture and its traits with those of the target language and, as part of good language proficiency, they should learn to take into account and, when required, act according to the cultural norms of the language. Furthermore, it is implied that the students should be able to tell about their lives, environment and culture in the foreign language. *(Framework curriculum for the senior secondary school* 1994, 70–76.)

In the general objectives for foreign language teaching in the *Framework surriculum for the senior secondary school* (1994, 72), "culture denotes – in addition to arts and sciences – the way of life of certain peoples or certain regions". However, the *Framework curriculum* defines culture also in a narrower or more traditional way. The curriculum for the teaching of foreign languages mention some compulsory courses, one of which is titled *Culture*. The syllabus of this particular course mentions arts, literature, music, film and theatre as possible topic areas *(Framework curriculum for the senior secondary school* 1994, 74).

Thus, even though in the objectives for foreign language teaching culture is defined in a broader way-of-life sense of the concept, in the actual syllabus of the culture course, culture is defined as "formal culture", or "Culture with a capital C" (cf. Brooks 1964; Stern 1992, 208).

## Culture as defined for the portfolio programme

In the framework for the portfolio course, culture as a topic area was defined in a very narrow sense including only institutionalized forms of culture, such as literature, drama, film, TV, music and arts. This limited definition was mainly based on the content description for the culture course given in the *Framework curriculum for the senior secondary school* (1994, 74). Nevertheless, although the topic area was thus rather limited, no discrimination between popular and high forms of culture, or adult culture and youth culture, was made. In other words, it was left for the students to decide whether they wanted to, say, read Shakespeare and Hemingway, or perhaps watch *the Bold and the Beautiful* on TV or listen to the CDs of Nirvana.

Even though it can be well argued that these institutionalized forms of civilization should not be regarded as synonymous with the term culture (Rivers 1981, 322), they nevertheless are some aspects of culture in its broader sense. It has also been argued that these aspects and forms of culture describe and reflect the world and cultures with their values, norms and manners, ie. culture in a broader sense (see e.g. Valdes 1986, 137–141). They may also reflect the world and life in a more international and multicultural sense: they sometimes depict things and feelings, for instance, that people with different cultural origins may appreciate and find relevant and real.

In addition, Sell (1994, 20–24) believes that learners can acquire cultural, sociocultural and also pragmatic knowledge from literature and thus acquire "a working knowledge of the complex interrelations of language and reality" (Sell 1994, 24). Moreover, Sell (1994) believes that in addition to improving learners' language proficiency, the use of literature in foreign language education will also motivate learners. Literary texts may evoke curiosity and excitement and give pleasure to their readers, which motivate further study of the language (Sell 1994). In addition to improving learners' language proficiency and motivation for language study, the use of different types of prose, poetry and drama in language education is believed to be enjoyable and interesting and thus to stimulate students' thoughts and feelings as well as promote their appreciation of literary texts (Carter & Long 1987). Literary texts may also give food for thought in a more general sense and hence challenge but also encourage students' thinking (Kramsch 1993).

The notions mentioned above apply also to other forms of culture, such as music, arts and films. Literature, cinema and theatre, for instance, can also evoke empathy and help to develop the kind of understanding that is needed in order to understand specific aspects of the target culture as well as thoughts, motives and feelings of the speakers of the target language (Stern 1992, 229). Stern (1992) also strongly believes that humanities have their place in culture teaching as some works of art or literature are often part of shared knowledge and are appreciated in society, but also because they can give more than cognitive information: through artistic impressions, they can provide affective, emotional experiences of the target language culture.

> In many cultures, particularly those whose languages are widely taught, literature performs an important role in society, particularly if we include folk tales, nursery rhymes, children's literature, and other widely read books which constitute a common heritage of literacy. Literary works sometimes epitomize the thoughts, feelings, and values of the target culture in memorable ways. The literary message may be superior to a formal exposition and can provide an excellent entry into a new world of thought and feeling. (Stern 1992, 230.)

Consequently, although we all – both the teachers and I – were well aware of the limitations and of the narrow scope of the definition of culture in the syllabus for the culture course, as well as its contradictions with the more general cultural objectives also mentioned in the *Framework curriculum for the senior secondary school* (1994), the definition of culture for the portfolio programme was mainly guided by the culture course syllabus. Furthermore, when the outline and the basic requirements for the portfolios were being defined, culture in its broader sense as a topic area was considered possibly to be too wide and vague for students' tasks in this portfolio experiment. Institutionalized forms of culture, such as music, cinema and literature, for instance, were considered to offer wide and diverse but clear topic areas which were believed to both interest the students and help them to select different topics for their pieces of work. However, we did not want to limit the topic area any further, for example only to high culture and literary classics, or to popular culture and entertainment, as we hoped that the topic area would cater for a great variety of students' different interests and that all students would find topics that truly interested them. The idea of fostering students' appreciation and enjoyment of different aspects of culture in general was, accordingly, one of our aims.

Admittedly, however, the idea of educating the students, of broadening their knowledge and interests in the fields of literature, arts, cinema and music, for instance, has probably been behind both the official syllabus for the culture course and our acceptance of such a content description. Ultimately, as Valdes (1986, 145) phrases her views when discussing the use of literature in the teaching of language and culture: "Expansion of horizons is the aim of all education".

CHAPTER 3

# The portfolio process

## The beginning of the course: discussing the goals, requirements and criteria

At the very beginning of the course, we – either the teacher or the teacher and I – talked to the students about the aims and syllabus of the culture course as it is defined in the official curricular framework. We also discussed portfolios as a learning and assessment tool in general. Then we presented the main principles of the portfolio course as well as its framework and basic requirements.

The framework and basic requirements of this course were the same for all the participating groups. First of all, the students were required to produce four or five pieces of work. Originally, we had thought of requiring five pieces of work, but in three groups the teacher decided either at the beginning or during the course that four pieces of work would be sufficient because of various other school projects that took a great deal of the students' time. Secondly, the pieces of work were expected to be diverse in their choice of topic, content and form, i.e. not all the pieces should be about music, or reviews, for example. Furthermore, both oral and written language – listening, speaking, reading and writing – were to be used either in the final products or in the working process. Self-assessment as well as giving and getting feedback were also considered important.

The requirements of the course were as follows:

- at least four or five pieces of work (the working portfolio)
- all areas of language skills (i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking) are to be used: the use of these skills in the working process can be documented in the working log
- active participation in class conferences (as well as in grammar and language laboratory lessons)
- an accepted final showcase portfolio whose requirements are:
  - a prologue in English
  - two or three selected pieces of work with their self-assessments (self-assessments can be written either in English or in Finnish)
  - the working log (in English)
  - an epilogue, i.e. a summative reflection and evaluation of the portfolio project (either in English or in Finnish)

During the introductory lesson, we also presented the assessment criteria for the student portfolios: the work was expected to exhibit a variety of topics and modes, it should display the student's involvement in, and responsibility for, his or her work, and the use of English should be fairly clear and fluent. Accordingly, grammatical correctness and good vocabulary alone were not the most important criteria for outstanding work. We also discussed the criteria in terms of what they meant in practice and asked for the students' comments and suggestions.

For assessment and self-assessment purposes, the students were also given the Finnish version of the following description of a good showcase portfolio:

**What is a good showcase portfolio like?**
Both the topics and forms of the pieces of work are many-sided. In addition to written work the pieces may include for instance oral presentations and taped or video-taped pieces. Both written and oral skills of English (reading, writing, listening and speaking) are used. The pieces of work are good, interesting and clear in content. Involvement in and responsibility for one's own work are essential assessment criteria. The language in the pieces of work is comprehensible, clear and rather fluent; grammatical accuracy is not, however, the most important or the sole criterion. The appearance of the work is good. Creativity and analysis, for instance comparing English-speaking culture to Finnish culture, are beneficial. Furthermore, the student has well engaged in the assessment and introduction of his or her work.

Consequently, the students knew from the first lesson of this course what the course would be like, what was expected of them and of their work, and how they would be assessed in this course: these all are considered important information so that the students could properly orientate and engage themselves in their work (Barton & Collins 1993; De Corte 1993). Knowing the requirements and the assessment criteria can also be seen as part of their rights as students and, thus, also part of their empowerment.

At this point, the students were also given a handout in Finnish with some general ideas about portfolios, a short introduction of this course, the basic requirements of the course as well as the description of a good portfolio with its assessment criteria (see Appendix 1). Thus, the students could go back to the handout in their folders whenever they wanted to check something, for instance, the requirements or the criteria. They could also show the handout at home and tell about the portfolio course.

The students were also given some ideas and background materials to help them set their own goals, choose their topics and plan their work. There were books, magazines, copies of articles and videofilms, for instance. In case the students wanted to use textbook materials for their work, as some students had a textbook which they had received from their older siblings or friends, the students were provided with a list of topics in two commonly used culture course text books. To provide students with ideas and examples, they were also told about some pieces of work that the pilot group had done. Furthermore, the teachers gave their groups an initial plan for the course time-table (see Appendix 2 for an example).

The students' role was somewhat different in this course compared to their usual English courses in the sense that the students were *given*, whether they wanted it or not, *a more active and responsible role* in, and control of, their learning process. Therefore, the purpose of all these actions was *to give the students resources* – information, ideas, materials and help – so that taking charge of their work would not be overwhelming. In other words, the idea was to support and foster their empowerment.

# The production of portfolios: learner-centred and self-directed work

## Students planning and starting their work

After the general information and discussion the students were asked to start planning their own portfolios. The development of the actual syllabus for this course thus became a collaborative effort between the students and teachers on the basis of the guidelines of the official curricular framework (cf. Nunan 1988, 2).

Guided by our experiences with the pilot group, we had planned to ask the students to write a sort of learning contract (see e.g. Hiemstra & Sisco 1990, 104–113) stating their goals, ideas, plans and timetable concerning their portfolio work, which was then to be shown to the teacher for approval. We had to give up this idea, however, as the students seemed to get their ideas and start working in very different ways and at their own pace. Nevertheless, we asked them to write down their tentative ideas and plans in their logs, which most students did.

All in all, even though there were quite a lot of ideas and materials available and the teacher and other students were there to help, it was not easy for every student to set their own goals and plan their work.

> *When I started this course my head was really empty, I didn't know what to do.* (095M)

> *I am not very good at English and culture is not my hobby (except for listening the music and watching TV), so at first the whole portfolio looked very difficult. I started to think:"What to do?" and then I (with my friends help) found these four subjects.* (078M)

> *I'm excited to start working, plenty of good ideas are running in my head.* (049F)

When planning and starting their work, quite a few students had one or two clear ideas for their portfolio pieces. For the remaining pieces they had perhaps some preliminary ideas for the topic area or for the form, for instance they wanted to do a poster, or a film review, or something about music. These ideas usually became clearer or more specific later on while the students were working on the first pieces. Often, however, the original ideas and plans – no matter how clear and definite they had seemed – changed because the topic did not prove to be as interesting as expected or because it was difficult to find enough information about the topic:

> *I had become familiar with the books of Agatha Christie and her work, got bored with the person and changed the character to be Queen Elisabeth II. (001F)*

> *Aluksi aioin tehdä henkilökuvan Anthony Hopkinsista, koska hän on yksi suosikkinäyttelijöistäni. Lähdeaineiston hankkiminen osoittautui kuitenkin ylivoimaiseksi tehtäväksi ja vaihdoin Anthonyn Tom Cruiseen. Hänestä löytyikin monen monta artikkelia ja olin tyytyväinen päästessäni aloittamaan henkilökuvan teon. Virittäydyin tunnelmaan katsomalla Top Gun-elokuvan, jonka löysin sattumalta etsiessäni päivän lehteä kirjahyllystä. (015F)*
> At first, I was going to make a portrait about Anthony Hopkins because he is one of my favourite actors. However, getting source materials about him proved to be an overwhelming task and so I changed Anthony to Tom Cruise. I managed to find numerous articles about him and I was glad that I could start doing the portrait. I tuned in by watching the film Top Gun, which I accidentally found in the bookshelf when I was looking for the day's paper. (015F)

Some students spent a great deal of time trying to find all four or five topics and did not start working on any piece until much later. Quite a few students had planned the forms of their pieces first and only then started to think about possible topics.

> *Ensimmäinen viikko oli pelkkää suunnittelua.*
> *Aiheiksi keksin:*
> *henkilökuva: James Bond*
> *elokuva arvostelu*
> *lehtiartikkelista tiivistelmä*
> *levy arvostelu*
> *aine*
> *Aiheet vielä alustavia. (083M)*
> The first week was mere planning. The topics I came up with:
> portrait: James Bond
> film review
> summary of an article
> music/ record review
> essay
> The topics are preliminary. (083M)

Students' abilities as well as their willingness to take control over their own learning thus varied considerably. Even though the students were given the right to decide for themselves, it was not enough to empower all of them. As some students clearly doubted the benefits of the portfolio course as well as learner-centredness and self-direction, they naturally had a great deal of difficulty in getting engaged in their work (cf. Järvelä & Niemivirta 1997). Hence, giving resources in the sense of materials, ideas and guidance was not necessarily enough to motivate or encourage all students to take charge of their own work. Nevertheless, there were also many students who had doubts or problems initially but who were able to overcome their difficulties either through persistence or inspiration:

> *Kaiken kaikkiaan pidin tästä työskentely tavasta paljon, vaikka alussa pelkkä ajatuskin sai karvani nousemaan. Kun hommaan todella paneutuu se opettaa todella paljon. Suosittelen kyllä jatkossakin tätä tapaa opiskella. (033F)*
> All in all, I liked this method of working a lot although the mere idea of it made me shiver at the beginning. When you really put yourself into it it teaches you a lot. I recommend this way of studying in the future, too. (033F)

> *At first I didn't like the idea that we do some kind of portfolio on our own. I was sure that I would do all the jobs just before the day when we the portfolio must give to teacher. Somehow all the jobs had done and without terrible rush. Usually I'm very lazy student but this time surprised gladly. We didn't had to sit in hot class-room, we had libery to do what we wanted and that was great. All the subjects came very naturally and I never had a fealing that I don't know what to do. (091F)*

## Culture as the topic area

For some students finding suitable ideas or topics as well as taking charge of their work were difficult throughout the course. One of the reasons for their difficulties seemed to be that, despite the discussion, ideas and background materials, many of the students defined culture in a very narrow way, for instance as being only 'high culture', literature or arts. Many also claimed that they were not interested in culture even though they said they were interested in films, books and music. The students' prior ideas and experience about culture seemed to influence their interpretations of the goals, requirements and instructions of this course quite heavily (cf. Lehtonen 1990, 16–17; von Wright 1993, 9). For example, one student complained about the strong emphasis on "art-culture", whereas another student in the same group was sorry that culture was defined as youth and pop culture alone, "as usual".

> *It was difficult to find good subjects because I haven't got any culture hobbies.* (083M)

> *The theme, art culture, wasn't, at least by my opinion, a very good choice. I would have enjoyed making portfolios from different topics. I also haven't got very much interest in culture in general, but I do listen to a lot of music and I'm very interested in the happenings of musical world. I also read a lot of books, but I have no cultural interest in books, I just read them.* (008M)

> *Unfortunately my culturehobbies are slights. I like to read books, draw, listen to the music, play piano, although I don't go often to the art exhbits or to other culture events.* (066F)

Even though there were also some girls who said that they were not interested in culture, some of the boys had rather rigid and restricted ideas and schemata about culture, which also limited their work more. It also appeared that a few boys, stating that they were not interested in culture, somehow liberated themselves from the responsibility: as they considered the topic area beyond both their interest and their control, they could attribute their low motivation as well as possible low success to external factors – in other words, the success and quality of their work was beyond their responsibility (cf. Weiner 1974; see also Järvelä & Niemivirta 1997).

> *I didn't like this job in the begin at all and I don't still like it because I'm not keen in literature.* (077M)

> *My hobbies are not in culture. Maybe that is one reason why my works aren't so good.* (103M)

In contrast, most of the girls who were not particularly culture-oriented kept on looking for topics that might interest them or they defined the concept of culture so that they could interpret their interests as having some cultural features. So did some of the boys. Some of these students also stated their disinterest in culture as a reason for perhaps not succeeding well, but they did not seem to reject the responsibility for their work: on the contrary, some of them seemed to work very hard, even drudge, although the topic area did not particularly interest them. Fortunately, some of them managed to find topics that truly interested them and got them engaged in their work.

*I am not a good writer and english is not my best subjects. I don't are interest in culture. Two totally unknown subjects for me. Result is katastrof. (104F)*

*Portfoliota olisi ollut mukavampi tehdä jos aiheita ei olisi rajoitettu kulttuuriin. Esimerkiksi urheilu olisi pitänyt sisältyä ehdottomasti aiheisiin. Toisaalta taas omat työni eivät vaikuta kulttuurilta, vaikka ne jotenkin sitä käsittelevätkin. (088F)*
It would have been nicer to do the portfolio if the topic area had not been limited to culture. The topics should absolutely have included sports, for example. On the other hand, my own pieces of work may not seem to be about culture even though they do deal with it somehow. (088F)

*It was quite interesting to look closely of culture in English. I am not usually interested in cultural things, but I think I made a pretty good job with my portfolio. I choose these works because I am interested of movies and books more than for example the opera. (034F)*

*Culture is not one of my favourite hobbies, so I think it's not hard to quess at the beginning I had very strong opinions about culture and expecially about culture in English. I was sure when I heard about portfolio that there could be need for some higher powers. I thought without them it would be impossible to get me working independently. But now afterwards I have a reason to boast myself. I did it, I did it!! It feels kind of... wonderful. Now I have front of me four works in English and about a month ago they were only an awful picture in my mind. (075F)*

On the other hand, there were many students, both boys and girls, who really liked the topic area, either because of their own hobbies and interests or because they saw the topic area as a very wide area offering a multiplicity of topics.

*As a violist, I'm of course interested in culture, especially in music. (039F)*

*I'm a cultural sponge, I become soaked in culture every day, I play many kinds of music, listen to even more kinds of music, read books and magazines, watch TV and movies (if these things can be called culture), so this portfolio project about culture was a great thing for me. (050M)*

*When I first heard that we were going to do a portfolio and the topic is culture, I was thrilled. The reason why I was so thrilled, was that I am a great friend of culture. I am very interested in modern art and literature. (099M)*

*All the time, during this course, I was very in this portfolio-working. The theme, arts, was the best possible for me. I was full of different kinds of ideas, so it was easy for me to start working. (016F)*

Nevertheless, in many cases it was difficult to define culture, and some topics suggested by students caused controversy. Is sports culture? If dancing is part of culture, how about ladies' gymnastics? Are basketball and other forms of highly popular sports not part of modern culture? How about tourism, international cookery or studying? Or high fidelity stereo systems? Some suggested topics seemed to be, in our opinion, brilliant and original extensions of culture – such as a poster dealing with five different Greek verbs for *to love* – but some topics did not fall within our perception of what culture should mean in this course. We tried to keep to the definition that was implied in the *Framework curriculum for the senior secondary school* (1994) – with culture consisting of literature, film, music, theatre and the arts. However, does the fact that we ultimately decided which topics were appropriate and dealt with culture contradict with the premises of empowerment?

## Working inside and outside the classroom

During the course the students' work was quite self-directed, and students were mostly free to decide on their own working pace, schedule and place. Out of about 35 lessons, the students were expected to attend about 15 lessons. Most of these lessons were class conferences that dealt with the portfolios, but there were two or three grammar lessons and language laboratory lessons as well. The language laboratory lessons were given mainly because both the students and the teachers felt that they were needed as practice for the matriculation examinations that the students were going to take the following spring. The topics dealt with in the grammar lessons included also writing instruction and mechanics, for instance coherence, punctuation and instructions for the writing of a review. In the Kesy groups, according to the students' decision, most of the grammar and language laboratory lessons were not obligatory. In the Teacher Training School groups some classroom lessons were needed also because of the demands of the teacher training programme. Otherwise, the students were free to study when and where they preferred.

In the Teacher Training School, the English lessons of the participating groups were either the first or last lessons of the day, and thus no free periods were left in the students' schedules. In general, the students and teachers liked the arrangement. However, some students said that it often led them to either sleep later in the morning or just go home or to town earlier and thus they 'lost' the time allotted to individual work.

In Kesy, the lessons were not placed at any particular times in the schedule, and most of the lessons were in the middle of the school day. Even when the lessons were allocated for personal study, the teacher was present in the classroom. Some students – even though not very many – used the classroom to do their work during the 'personal study lessons' and also asked for the teacher's help. Some students complained about the personal study lessons: they felt that they could not concentrate on their work during the odd hour or two in the middle of the day but had to do the work at home, and as the school days became long, the work at home felt hard.

In general, however, having the chance to decide on the time and place for working, most students seemed to prefer working at home and mainly when "the time was right". For some students the freedom to decide for themselves offered refreshing learning environments or a chance to work when they were insprired.

> *Vaihtelevat työpaikat piristivät ja hyvin mieluisaksi koin kirjaston ja parvekkeen (015F)*
> Varying working places were refreshing and I found the library and the balcony very nice places to work. (015F)

> *25. 4. Sun is shining! Read Shakespeare outside! (thou tell'st me there is murder in his eye - )*
> *I love his way to write! (040F)*

> *Sunday, 24th*
> *It's a guarter to five now and the cartoon is almost ready. I really enjoued doing it, especially today because I had a change to draw it in the backgard of my house. The sun was shining and it was very warm. (061F)*

> *Kaikkein mukavimmalle maistui vapaus, eli mahdollisuus työskennellä juuri silloin kun aika oli sopivin. (009F)*
> The most pleasant thing was the freedom, that is the opportunity to work just when the time was the most convenient. (009F)

> *25.4. It's midnight and I can't sleep because I've had an idea. I'm going to write about grunge. But now I'm going to sleep. (053M)*

> *About the schedule: ... err, as you know writing a story can only be done when the moment is right. So I'll be waiting for it. Don't worry, I'm quite sure it will come soon. (030M)*

In some cases, however, it took a while to wait for the right inspiration. To start the first piece of work seemed to be the most difficult enterprise for some students and, hence, some postponed it as long as they could. However, having produced the first piece, some students' reluctance or distress eased a little. In some cases, the difficulties continued.

> *4th of May, 1994*
> *- - I still don't like this portfoliosystem, but now that I have started and done something this doesn't feel so bad as it felt at the beginning.* (071M)

> *Monday 23. 5.*
> *I think and think... if I think more I'm soon as clever as Ainstain.* (098M)

All in all, quite a few students had a great deal of work to do at the end of the course. Nevertheless, even if suffering from last minute panic, some students regarded being in charge of their own use of time as a beneficial and even refreshing learning experience. On the other hand, some students took their responsibility so seriously that they could never quite relax as they constantly felt that they should have been working. Moreover, however inspired or involved, most students experienced weariness with their work at some point during the course.

> *The biggest problem in my works was that I left everything to the last. I didn't do them intensivecally enought.* (053M)

> *I have finally finished my portfolio after a couple of burnouts and sleepless nights. (no, I'm just kidding.) However, I have to admit that it wasn't easy for my kind of lazy person. I didn't realize how much work there is in making a portfolio. - -*
> *I knew it right away when I heard we are going to make a portfolio that I would going to have problems with making it. My biggest one turned out to be the one that I didn't done it in time. I thought that it was fun to have some freetime instead of english classes. But I'm much wiser now.* (045M)

> *April, the 21st*
> *I'm so happy that I managed to do something today. I thought I couldn't sleep if I hadn't got something done.* (042F)

> *A implementation of the works was usually nice, but sometimes it was like I would have drink a tar. When you must do something, it isn't fun.* (035F)

## Working logs for monitoring the process

The students were asked to write down notes about their work in their *working logs*, so that both the students and teachers could analyse and monitor their individual working processes. The students were asked to write down what they had done but also comment on their work, its progress and their learning.

The entries in the students logs were very different. Some students had described their work in detail, some in a very general way. Some students' notes were very scarce and sporadic.

> *Friday 15th 4.*
> *time: 15.00–17.00*
> *place: library*
> *I found few interesting books, which tell about English and American poetry, so I spent my time reading them. In one book there're lots of beautiful, old poems from different poets. Many of them are written in old english so it took time to understand them. I have a plan to do an essay or a portrait of William Wordworth or Emily Dickinson.*
> *I'd like to do a casset, where's some information about Sting and also some of his songs. I tried to find a book, which tells about his, but someone had borrowd it. So I must wait.* (016F)

> 22.4. *I watched a film called Indiana Jones and the last crusade and decided to do a film review from it*
> 25.4. *I watched the film again and made notes by writing them down*
> 27.4. *I started to do it in Finnish*
> 28.4. *I finished the story in Finnish and decided to complete it in English tomorrow.*
> 29.4. *I finished the story and I'm little surprised for what I had accomplished. It wasn't too difficult to do but not too easy either.* (106M)

> *friday 13th may*
> *early weekend again*
> *ps. I am so lazy!* (095M)

Although the students were asked to write their log entries in English, a few students wrote in Finnish. Some students found keeping the logs either bothersome, a waste of time or not "their style" – or even an invasion of their privacy. A few students actually wrote nothing or very little in their working logs.

*Työpäiväkirjan pitoa en pidä kovin tarpeellisena, koska jokin päivä saattaa lukea kirjaa vaikka 3 x 10 min ja kirjoittaa vaikka johonkin juttuun vain pari riviä. Sillä hetkellä ei tule niitä merkittyä ja myöhemmin niitä ei enään muista. Itse ainakin käytin tätä vihkoa lähinnä muistiinpanoja varten. (036F)*
I don't find keeping the log very useful because one day you may read a book three times, about 10 minutes at a time, and write only a couple of lines to some piece. At that point you just don't happen to write them down in your log and later on you won't remeber them anymore. I used the log myself mainly for taking down notes. (036F)

*I almost hate it when my mother bought me dairies; they still lye in my drawer at home without any marks. (039F)*

*Tämä "lokikirjan" teko mättää vaan tosi pahasti. Nimittäin mä en jaksais tehdä mitään tänne ja mua ällöttää kun tää luetaan. Tuntuu jotenkin että intimiteettisuojaa on rikottu. (091F)*
Keeping this log really gets to me. Namely, I'd rather not bother with writing anything here and, moreover, I hate the fact that this will be read. Feels somehow like my privacy would be violated. (091F)

Nevertheless, the comments written in the logs, either in English or in Finnish, were interesting and informative. The teachers could get information about the students' strategies in their working processes, and the students themselves could probably recall the process more easily with the help of their log entries.

*10.5. Luin oppikirjan kielioppiosuudesta substantiivien ja genetiivien monikko ja yksikkö muotoja. Tein myös harjoitustehtävät.*
*11.5. Aloin suunittelemaan ainettani suomeksi. Sain melkein valmiiksi (siis suomeksi).*
*12.5. Kirjoitin aineeni englannin kielellä. Aineen kirjoittaminen tuntui helpommalta kuin ennen näiden kahden jo valmiin portfoliotyön jälkeen.*
*13.5. Hain kirjastosta tietoja kuuluisista säveltäjistä. Aion tehdä seuraavaksi julisteen säveltäjistä.*
*Kuuntelin englanninkielistä musiikkia radiosta ja yritin tajuta laulujen "sanomaa". Ensikuulemalta aika vaikeaa. (068F)*
10. 5. I read the singular and plural forms of the nouns and genetives in the grammar section of the study book. I did the exercises, too.
11. 5. I started to plan my essay in Finnish. I almost finished it (in Finnish).
12. 5. I wrote my essay in English. Writing the essay felt easier than before now after the two finished pieces.
13. 5. I searched information about famous composers in the library. Next I am going to make a poster about composers.

> I listened to music in English on the radio and tried to understand the "*message*" of the songs. Pretty difficult on the first listening. (068F)

## Working individually and in groups

Both inside and outside the classroom, the students worked both on their own and in pairs or small groups. Albeit learning in co-operatively structured groups has been advocated as an empowering pedagogy (Sapon-Shevin & Schniedewind 1991; Schniedewind & Sapon-Shevin 1997), the students were free to decide for themselves with whom they wanted to work. In class conferences the students were also free to choose their own groups and partners for feedback. The reason for allowing the students free choice of partners lay in empowerment: we considered it important to let the students make their own decisions concerning their partners.

Most groups functioned well. Some groups consisted of students who were approximately at the same proficiency level or who had similar interests. Thus, the students shared some background features which seemed to facilitate their co-operation. For instance, high proficiency-level students working together appeared to give each other suitable feedback and support concerning both the language and the content of their work.

On the other hand, there were groups which consisted of students whose English proficiency levels were rather different. In one such group, the higher proficiency-level students helped the weakest student by teaching him many basic grammatical structures and giving feedback on his pieces. The student found it easier to ask for clarifications and help from his peers in a small group than to ask the teacher "stupid questions" in the presence of the whole group. In another similar group, however, the highest proficiency-level student considered helping and teaching the others rather demanding and time-consuming.

> *Kielioppivirheet teksteissä alkoi jo harmittaakin, mutta onneksi auttajia löytyi näyttämään virheitä ja selittelemään syitäkin. Virheistään oppii. Kaikilta luokkatovereilta saattoi myös kysyä sanoja tai rakenteita jo ennen varsinaista kirjoittamista.* (047M)
> Grammatical mistakes in my texts started to annoy me but fortunately there were helping hands to show the mistakes and to explain the reasons, too. You learn from your mistakes. You could also always ask your classmates for words or grammatical structures before the actual writing. (047M)

> *The most difficult thing was to work with two other girls who are not so good in English so I had to help them a lot and we did not have mutual time at all. (034F)*

Accordingly, in most cases the student-formed groups seemed to work quite well. The success of group dynamics could result from the homogeneity of the group – the students' similar interests or similar proficiency levels – but also from the heterogeneity of the group – different proficiency levels or different viewpoints that contributed to the whole. The most important reason for the success of group dynamics was, perhaps, that the students regarded the group as comfortable and suitable for them and wanted to work together.

> *The group project was the one I liked most to work with. We had a good team and we had fun together. (086F)*

> *My friends were a great help. If I sunk in to the darkness without a single intelligent thought, they gave me some ideas. It was sort of a kick in the but: Go on! (094F)*

> *12th of May*
> *- - By the way, M was here yesterday and we evaluated each other's works. It was easy. It wasn't hard for us at all to estimate one another's works and say what could be different and so on... I like to have critics about my works and I like to give them. Some find it difficult, I know, but I don't. You learn a lot both ways. (042F)*

Nevertheless, in some cases the student-formed groups did not seem to function. If students who were not interested in the portfolio course at all grouped together, they easily reinforced each other's negative attitudes towards the course. In such cases, co-operative groups formed by the teacher might have worked more efficiently and might also have provided some students with appropriate help and encouragement that could have guided and supported their working processes as well as their processes of taking responsibility for their work. In other words, co-operatively structured working groups might have fostered their learner empowerment.

## Feedback in class conferences

Class conferences were held once a week and there the students were asked to go through each other's work and comment on it in small groups in order to improve it. Thus, the purpose of class conferences was to provide students with co-operative and social learning situations, namely, to offer a forum for giving and getting feedback as well as for learning from each other and their work.

The teachers also tried to monitor and comment on the students' work while the work was in progress and thus provide immediate feedback, support and additional help if needed. In larger groups, with the teacher having more than 30 students, this was, however, sometimes quite difficult. If I was present, I also read and commented on students' work.

In general, class conferences proved more problematic and less efficient than we had expected. General matters, for instance the revision of portfolio requirements or criteria, did not cause any problems but giving feedback was considered very difficult. To make peer-assessment easier, we gave students some basic questions that they could use as a starting point: the idea was that the students would start from the positive and try to help to improve the piece. Similar questions are widely used in process writing (see e.g. Linnakylä et al. 1989; White & Arndt 1991, 130):

> What was the best or the most interesting thing in this piece of work?
> Did the piece raise any questions in your mind?
> Was there something you would like to know more of, or something you did not quite understand?
> How would you improve the piece?
> What did you learn from it?

The students were specifically told not to correct grammatical or spelling mistakes: they could underline the mistakes, or mark that they did not understand something because of the language, but then leave the actual correcting to the writers themselves. When reading and commenting on work in progress, the teachers did not correct the mistakes, either, but underlined them. If the writers did not know what was wrong, or did not know how to correct the mistake, they were encouraged to ask other students or the teacher for further help. The underlying idea was that the students should try to find out the correct forms and thus learn them instead of leaving their work for others to correct and polish. Some students appreciated the idea and said that, when trying to correct their own mistakes, they actually learnt a lot. Some students, however, said that it would have been better if the teacher had corrected the mistakes and thus spared a great deal of the students' time and trouble for more important things.

> *Kielioppiakin oppii uudella tavalla, kun joutuu alleviivatuista kohdista miettimään itse mitä siinä on tullut tehtyä väärin. (015F)*
> You learn also grammar in a new way when you have think yourself what you had done wrong with the underlined bits. (015F)

> *Tietenkin ymmärrän alleviivauksien tarkoituksen, että oppilas itse osaa korjata virheensä ja myös oppii niistä samalla, mutta kuitenkin olisi ollut parempi, että opettaja olisi korjannut virheet, aikaa olisi näin ollut enempi. (003F)*
> Of course, I understand the meaning of underlining the mistakes, that the student can correct the him- or herself and so learn from them at the same time, but I still think that it would have been better if the teachers had made the corrections, and so there would have been more time. (003F)

Nevertheless, quite a few students said that the feedback which they got was important and helped them to improve their work. Positive feedback was also considered encouraging and supportive. Furthermore, feedback groups offered a forum for discussing and solving problems. Perhaps feedback could also help students in their own self-assessment by showing what different readers appreciated and what kind of things they commented on.

> *I got feedback very much and I also wanted that, because only that way I can learn something new, which gives me something that I can use some day in future. I got very much different feedback and that is wonderful that my friends in my group gave feedback to me. They were so honest and it was very nice to work with them. (059F)*

> *Sain hyvää palautetta sekä opettajalta että luokkakavereiltani, tavallisten kielioppivirheitten lisäksi myös töitten kokonaisvaikutelmasta. (001F)*
> I got good feedback both from the teacher and from my classmates, in addition to ordinary grammatical mistakes also about the general impression of the pieces. (001F)

> *Palautteesta sain "kimmokkeen" yrittää löytää vaihtoehtoisia tapoja sanoa joitakin fraaseja, ja tietysti mukavaa kannustusta. (010F)*
> The feedback gave me an "incentive" to try to find alternative ways of saying some phrases, and of course it also gave me nice encouragement. (010F)

> *Töissä ilmenneet ongelmat selvisivät kätevästi Class Conference -tunneilla. (038M)*
> The problems encountered with the works were deftly solved at Class Conferences. (038M)

> *Ryhmän kanssa käydyt keskustelut olivat tärkeitä. Ryhmän jäsenillä oli samantapaisia ongelmia ja puhumalla niistä turhat paineet katosivat. Oli mielenkiintoista ja opettavaista nähdä myös toisten töitä. (068F)*
> The discussions with the group were important. The members of the group had similar problems and by talking about them you could clear off unnecessary distress. It was interesting and informative to see also others' works. (068F)

However, to make feedback sessions more efficient for all students, more modelling and scaffolding would still have been needed. Some feedback groups consisted of students who had produced nothing or very little, and then, naturally, they had nothing to comment on or discuss during the sessions. Such groups could not provide their members with much support, ideas or feedback. In some groups, some students did not want to show their unfinished work to their peers, and sometimes students also felt that they did not have much to say about the pieces. Therefore, perhaps at least some of the class conference sessions should have been more organized by dividing the students into organized co-operative groups or by giving the groups some more structured tasks. Or perhaps there should have been more class conferences towards the end of the course but not so many in the middle of the course, as one student suggested.

> *Every week we had so called "Class Confrenss (CC) meetings where we were supposed to discuss about our portfolios. It didn't work. We did talk about them, but only for five minutes, and after that we just talked about everything else. (043M)*

> *10.5. CC It's hard for us to say anything about the portfolio – we are just making fun of each other or laughing. T won't let me read anything she has written. The others do. (040F)*

> *Olisin toivonut lisää class conference -tunteja kurssin loppupuolelle, jolloin olisi saanut enemmän palautetta myöhemmin tehdyistä töistä. (001F)*
> I would have liked more class conference sessions towards the end of the course when you could have had more feedback about the pieces that were made later. (001F)

Despite various problems, class conferences seemed beneficial and actually needed. If there were no feedback sessions, some students would probably not get their peers' comments at all. The work could be very lonely: the social aspect of learning would be ignored, the students would get little if any support, ideas, help and encouragement from their peers. Some of the students might not show their work in progress to the teachers either and, thus, it would be very difficult to help and guide the students who would need help the most. From the very beginning, the students would have to be highly autonomous – very motivated, goal-oriented and certain of what they wanted to do as well as used to working on their own – to cope with working alone. Even though we wanted to empower the students to become goal-oriented and self-directed, we did not want to leave them on their own. Instead, we wanted to encourage them to work together and learn from each other and thus foster their empowerment.

> *Myös class conference -tunnit vaativat parempaa suunnittelua. Nyt ne monesti olivat aika turhia, eikä niillä saatu aikaan oikein mitään. Class conference -tunnit ovat kuitenkin ehdottomasti tarpeellisia.* (088F)
> Class conference -sessions need better planning. Now they were often pretty fruitless/ useless, and we didn't get much anything done. However, class conferences are absolutely necessary. (088F)

## Support in case of problems

The students were encouraged to come and ask the teacher for help if they had any problems. In Kesy, the teacher was in the classroom during all the English lessons marked in the timetable and the students could also come and work in the classroom, or they could come and ask for the teacher's advice and help, as some, albeit not very many, students did. In the Teacher Training School, since the lessons were located either at the beginning or end of the schooldays, the teachers were not present in the classroom during those lessons. However, the students were encouraged to come and see the teachers whenever they felt they wanted comments or advice.

Nevertheless, some students did not voluntarily come and show their work to the teachers for feedback, nor did some students ever seek advice or help. In some of these cases, the students might have needed more concrete support for and control over their working processes. In accordance, some students wanted tighter control and clearer deadlines for individual pieces of work:

> *Muilta oppilailta ja opettajalta sai apua silloin kun meni itse pyytämään. Näin suurta työtä tehdessä olisin ainakin itse odottanut suurempaa kontrollointia työn edistymisestä.* (104F)

> You got help from other students and the teacher when you went to ask for it yourself. When doing such a big task, at least I would have expected tighter control over the work and its progress. (104F)

> *One problem in my working was the laziness. There should have been more strighten preparingsdates.* (065M)

Because we had seen with the pilot group that the organization of time was difficult for some students without any deadlines and their control and sanctions, we had tried to introduce them at the beginning of the course. However, at least in some groups, the attempt at tighter control was vociferously disapproved: most students said that they wanted to have the freedom and responsibility of being in charge of their work. Therefore, we abandoned our plans for tighter control and mid-course deadlines. Nonetheless, we were reminded of our attempt:

> *One thing, which made me really sad was the GESTAPO-feeling, which occured sometimes. Sometimes I felt that the big brother is watching me. It sometimes made me really angry when we treated like freak of nature children, who are not wise enough to take care of themselves. I understand that you want to take care of us, and I appreciate that, but you don't have to chain us! I hope you understand me.* (014M)

## A wide range of personal pieces of work

The pieces of work that the students produced were diverse in their choices of topic and form. Compared to our suggestions – for instance, a review of a film or a book, or a portrait of an artist and his or her art – the students' portfolios exhibited much more original ideas and also a more varied and comprehensive definition of culture.

Book, film or TV reviews were very popular, though. The topics ranged from *Little Women* to J. R. R. Tolkien's whole production; from *The Bold and the Beautiful* to *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. There were many portraits as well, ranging from Carl Barks to Toni Morrison, from Charles Chaplin to Tom Cruise and from Michael Jackson to Maurice Ravel, to cite a few. Fictional characters, for instance James Bond and the Peanuts, were portrayed, too.

Very many students had wanted to express themselves and create something of their own. There were poems, short stories, fairytales, cartoons and even songs. One student had written a seven-page-long fairytale called *the Life of the Brownies* in rhyming English; another student produced a comic strip about the difficulties encountered when making a portfolio. Some students had taped their own radio shows or radio plays; some had videotaped small plays or films. Songs and poems of their own were, however, the most popular. Many of them dealt with love:

**On the seaside**

*I was so happy at the time,*
*when we walked by the seaside.*
*There was alot of cliffs and sand,*
*and you held my hand.*
*We looked at the waves of the sea,*
*which were going to run over you and me.*
*The sun was shining so warm and sweet,*
*that beamed beautifully on grass and reed.*
*That was only a little while,*
*but I can't recall that*
*without a smile.* (006F)

**The body of a woman**

*The body of a woman, the white hills, the white thighs.*
*At the moment of thy surrender thee are the world in my eyes.*
*My coarse, rustic body fuses to thy sweet*
*and from the bottom of the soil bounds it's son so fleet.*

*I was alone like a tunnel and the birds*
*took to flight from me.*
*the night and the darkness used to force in me.*
*To survive alive I forged thee to my weapon.*
*Like an arrow to my cross-bow, like a stone to my sling.*
*Oh love, you were my everything.*

*It shall break the day of revenge, but now I love thee,*
*the sweetness of thy soft skin, thy voracious sap.*
*Oh, the joys of thy breasts, thy preoccupied eyes.*
*Oh, the roses of thy hills of venus.*
*Oh, thy moaning, gentle voice.*

*The body of a woman. I shall not let thy sweetness wither away.*
*My hunger, my lust, my endless road.*

> *The misty beds which the eternal thirst still follows*
> *and the tiredness with endless suffer.*
> *Once so soft and warm body is now cold as stone.*
> *I'm sorry I loved thee too much.*
> *If there's a heaven, please, wait for me.*
> *I'll be there soon. If there's room for me.*
> *The killer.* (022M)

Several students had engaged themselves in finding different source materials for various project papers and essays in English. For example, one student had investigated the Celts and their culture; another student had studied Romanticism in music, and yet another one had analysed Kullervo (one of the central characters in the Finnish national epic *the Kalevala*) in Finnish arts and society:

> *"Kullervo, son of Kalervo, blue-stockinged son of an old man, with yellow locks, handsome with shoes with fine uppers" was the most tragical person in Kalevala, Finnish National Epic. Kullervo's life was miserable since the cradle – and the end was shocking. He is some kind of "pattern" of Finnish failure – part of merciless living in the time of Kalevala but especially nowadays. There are too many Kullervos in the middle of us.* (017M)

Following Shakespeare's footsteps, one student presented Stratford-upon-Avon, and another discussed the problem of power in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. An old book of American and English poetry had inspired a student to write a booklet about Emily Dickinson and her poetry imitating the 19th century handwriting and ornaments. The Bible had inspired a group of four students to analyse the stylistic differences in two Finnish and English translations of *Genesis* (see Figure 1).

There were also taped discussions or interviews dealing with various aspects of culture. Furthermore, there were, for instance, a poster focussing on language as part of a culture *(Five Ways to Love in Greek)*, another poster presenting some Britons' views on the effects of the European Union on British traditions and customs, a brochure telling about the sights of Guernsey, and a video introducing the museums in Jyväskylä. There were essays analysing the students' own hobbies and cultural interests, and papers discussing the effects of violence on TV or the role of sports in culture.

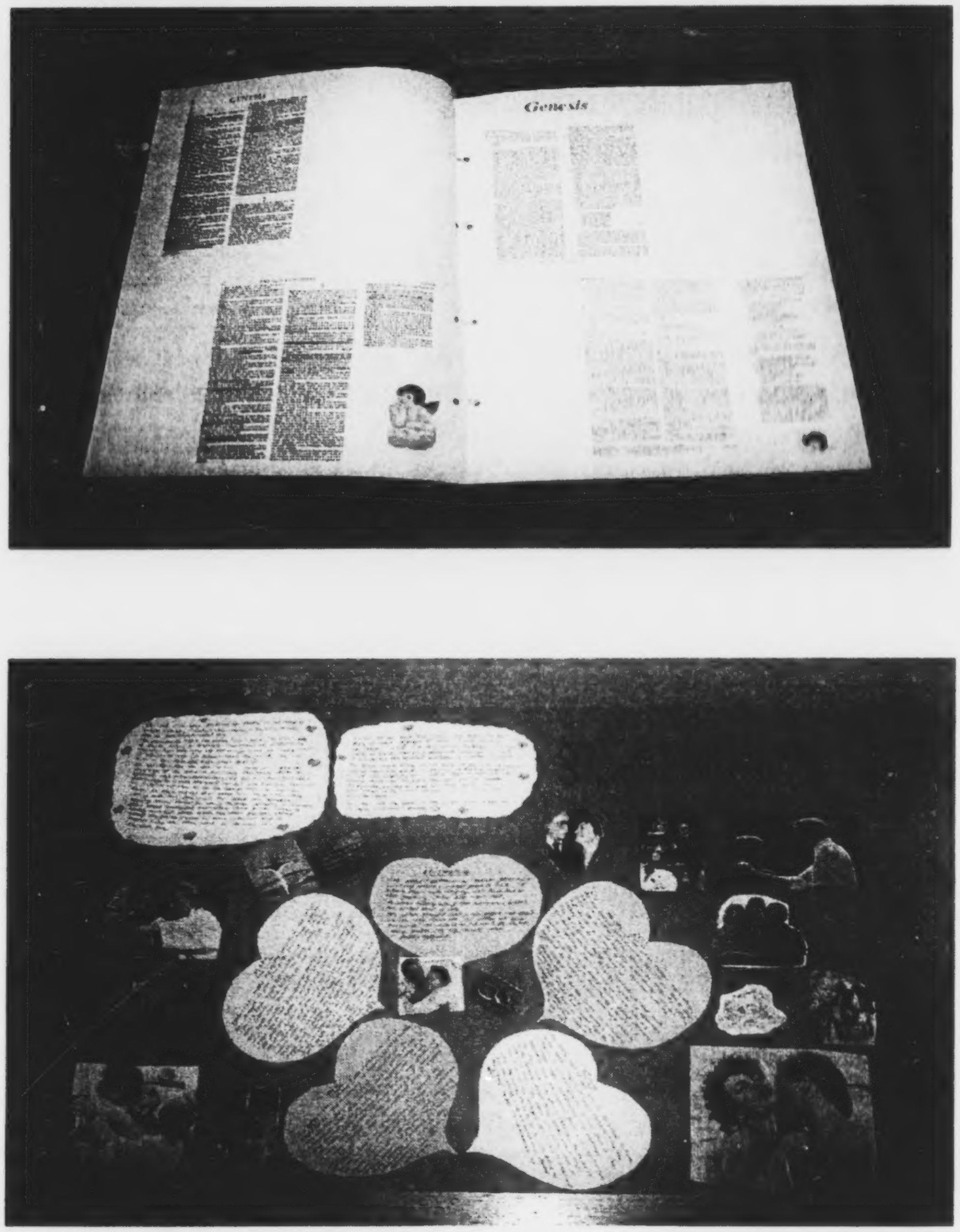

*Figure 1. The literary analysis of Genesis and the poster discussing five different Greek verbs for to love.*

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Contrary to our possible expectations, the topics did not focus on youth culture or popular culture alone but were very diverse, as can also be seen from the examples exhibited in Table 1. All in all, even though a few students defined culture in a very narrow way as only consisting of literature or arts, the diversity of student work showed that no standard textbook could possibly define and deal with culture as creatively as students themselves could. Furthermore, most topics were based on the students' own choices, either on their hobbies or fields of interest or on topics that the students wanted to learn about. In other words, they were ecologically relevant to the students. Consequently, instead of "having to say something", they really appeared to have "something to say" (Dewey 1956, 56).

Many students had also paid attention to the visual side of their work (see Figure 2). Generally speaking, the boys' and girls' pieces often looked different: girls embellished their work primarily with colours, pictures and drawings as well as neat, personal handwriting styles whereas boys mainly employed different fonts, layouts and photos to enliven their work.

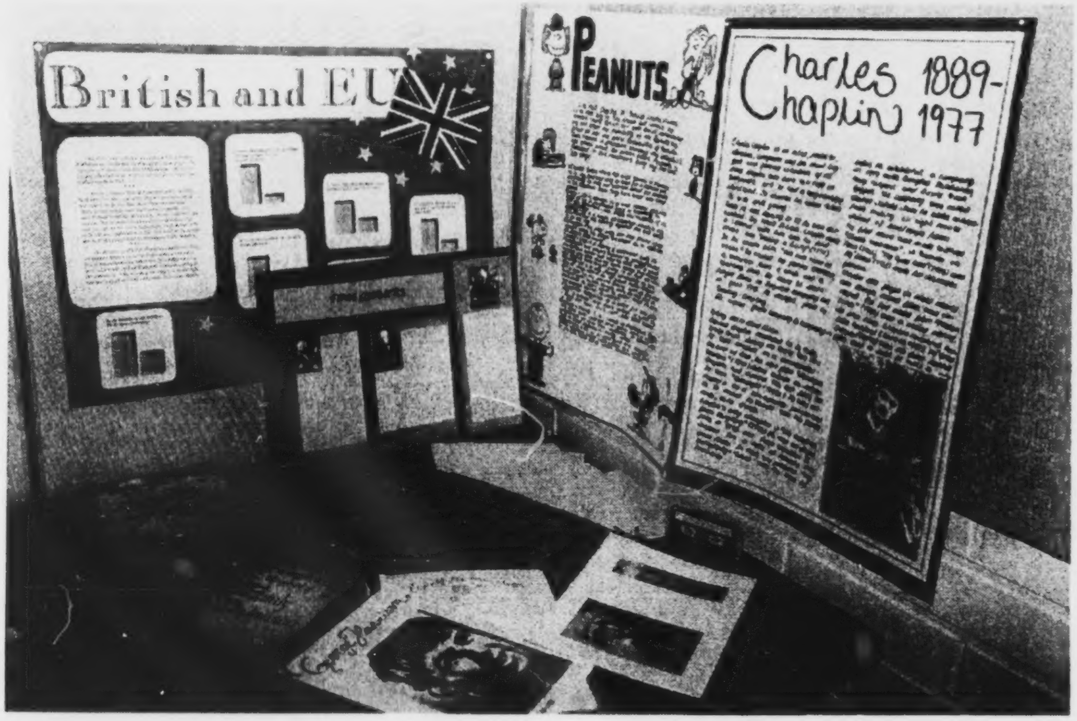

*Figure 2. Some examples of the students' work*

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*Table 1.* *Examples of different pieces of portfolio work.*

**A book/ film /play /record etc. review**
- *Breakfast at Tiffany's - a book review*
- *The Lord of the Rings - a book review*
- *Agatha Cristie's Miss Marple Tells a Story*
- *Schindler's List - a film review*
- *The Age of Innocence - a film review*
- *Walt Disney's Bambi - my favourite*
- *Dr. Quinn - Medicine woman - review of a TV series*
- *What I Think about Pantera's New Album*
- *Seminaarinmäen Mieslaulajat on the Grassroot level Concert*
- *Misi - the Musical*

**A portrait of an artist and/ or his/her work**
- *A portrait of famous writer: Graham Greene*
- *Ernest Hemingway*
- *What was wrong with Vincent van Gogh?*
- *Madonna - The Goddess Of The Nineties*
- *Ella Fitzgerald*
- *Rudolf Nureyev*
- *H. R. Giger's Biography*
- *Hugo Simberg*
- *Clyde Drexler's basketball career*

**Different presentations (written/ oral/ taped/ multimedia, etc)**
- *Baroque*
- *Queen Elisabeth II - her childhood*
- *Virtual Reality*
- *Flamenco - the music*
- *Disco- and showdance - what's it all about?*
- *The Ideal Body all through the Centuries*

**Poster**
- *Rita Hayworth*
- *Guns'n'Roses*

**Personal commentaries, essays, etc.**
- *A personal commentary on John Irving*
- *My opinion about MTV*
- *Soaps - Are They Such A Bad Thing After All?*
- *My friend, violin*
- *I Have a Dream - an essay about racism*

**Creative products**
- e.g. a short story, poem or song written by the student
  - *The Fountain - a short story*
  - *A story of a fellow called John - a short story with music*

        *The Body of Woman - a poem*
        *The Four Seasons - paintings and poems*
    a film, play or radio-play
        *Boris Yeltsin visits Jyväskylä - a video*
        *The Caotic Bear - a radioplay (written by the students themselves)*
        *The House at Pooh Corner - a radio-play (dramatized from Milne's story)*

**Summary**
    *James Bond*
    *Andy - the Media Star*

**Interview or discussion**
    *Talking about Music*
    *Differences between English and Finnish culture - an interview*

## The showcase portfolios

By the end of the course, having completed four or five different pieces, the students were asked to choose two or three pieces for their showcase portfolios. In addition to the selected pieces and their self-assessments, the showcase portfolios were to include a prologue and an epilogue. To help the students to write the various self-assessments, the students were given some questions and suggestions that they could use as a starting point (see Appendix 3).

The purpose of the prologue was to introduce the portfolio and the student to the reader.

> *Hello, this is me and this is my portfolio. I've just finished it. It was quite easy: I just had to think what I liked and what I disliked and then combine them two into an easy-acceptable word salad. For example, there's nothing I like more than senseless rhymes and meaningless lines (If A Man Was A Bird - poem) and there's nothing I hate more than lousy lyrics (Madd-afugen... -song). So I put them into a bowl and mixed in some trivial ingredients...Served shaken not stirred. (031M)*

> *I have completed 4 different pieces of work, all having something to do with me and things I like: music, literature, film, poetry... Finding yourself, as an individual, is important for every one of us. - -*
> *I think that there's something about me captured in this portfolio! (040F)*

> *My works are done from the topics, which I like. My first and also the main work is made of my (almost) favourite band CCR. Another work is a book review. I like reading books, so this was quite a natural choice to me. Third work, "comic-summary", was afunny idea, which i*

> *had to carry out. Idea to mine last work, musical overview came, when i (desperately) was thinking about what to do. (041M)*

## Selecting work for the showcase portfolios

Some students considered the selection of two or three pieces of work for their final portfolios very difficult, mainly because either they had invested so much in them all or they regarded the pieces as different but equally important or good.

> *The only difficulty was ranking the two best out of the four. The movie preview had to step aside. There were the last three remaining. It wasn't easy choice. After some thinking I ended up to the portrait of J. R. R. Tolkien and to the review of the Misi musical. The personal commentary about Comics was an excellent one, too, but I had to make some choices. (105M)*

> *It was very hard to choose three from my five little pieces of work because, in my opinion, they're all equally good and I like them all. (027F)*

Accordingly, some students wanted to include all their pieces or they wanted to leave out only one piece. However, most of these students assessed all included pieces.

> *Mä en kyllä pysty näistä töistä kahta pudottamaan, enkä edes halua. Olen kuitenkin itse äheltänyt niiden kanssa eräänkin tunnin ja pistänyt paloja itsestäni paperille etenkin Nuoruudessa ja Schindlerin listassa. (075F)*
> I can't drop two of these pieces, and I don't even want to. I've worked so much and so many hours with them and put pieces of myself on paper, especially in Youth and in Schindler's List. (075F)

Some students also doubted the benefits of the selection. In their opinion, it would have been fairer to include all since some students seemed to concentrate only on two pieces and still get good grades, whereas some produced all four or five pieces diligently.

There were also a few students who did not select nor assess any of their pieces at all.

## Criteria for selection

In spite of the difficulty of selection, most students nevertheless managed to select and assess their pieces. In their criteria for the selection the students often emphasized *the personal relevance of the piece.*

Personal relevance was due to various factors. *The amount of work* and *the working process* were often mentioned: the student had invested a great deal of work in the piece, or the working process had been rewarding or important for learning or practising something that the student considered beneficial for his or her English skills. Some students also emphasized their *learning outcomes.*

> *Second work I've chosen is my Picasso-work. It's my best work, it's most comprehensive. I've used several sources and did lots of work. It may not seen in this work, but I for example learned hugely new words. I also invested in works looks. (082M)*
>
> *I think my best work was movie review The three musketeers because I work it so hard. I think that these work prove that I'm not so lazy and stupid that you thought. (107M)*
>
> *This work is important for me, because it was my first book, which I have read in English and it takes so much time to clear up it. (047M)*
>
> *"The house at pooh corner", a radio-play*
> *This was a group-work and it was good for me, because my oral skills aren't too good. And it was fun doing it. (022M)*
>
> *The third work is my favourite one. Not because of the appearance but because of the work we did to it with my sister. (018M)*
>
> *Syy, miksi tein tiivistelmän yhtenä työnä on että haluan harjoitella tiivistelmän tekoa siltä varalta, että sellainen tulee YO-kirjoituksiin. (063F)*
> The reason I made a summary as one of my pieces of work is that I want to practise writing summaries in case there's one in our Matriculation Exams. (063F)
>
> *Tätä työtä tehdessäni opin kaikkein eniten kielellisesti ja sen perusteella tämä oli tärkein työni. (005F)*
> When doing this piece I learnt most languagewise and for that reason this was my most important piece of work. (005F)
>
> *Valitsin tämän työn sillä olen kiinnostunut Englantilaisista pikkukaupungeista ja halusin perehtyä niistä yhteen hiukan syvällisemmin. Stratfordiin päädyin käsitellessämme Shakespearea Englannin tunnilla.*

> *Olen tyytyväinen että tein juuri tämän työn sillä yleissivistyksessäni oli pahoja aukkoja juuri Shakespearen kohdalla. Tehtävän ansioista minun tuli samalla perehdyttyä Shakespeareen itseensä. (009F)*
>
> I chose this piece because I'm interested in small English towns and I wanted to get acquainted with one of them a bit better. I came up with Stratford when we studied Shakespeare in our English lesson.
>
> I'm happy that I did this piece because there were bad deficiencies in my education and civilization concerning Shakespeare. Because of this work, I also got to know about Shakespeare himself. (009F)

*The personal importance of the topic or of the piece itself* were also often mentioned. Some students chose the pieces for their showcase portfolios using different criteria for different pieces: one for the amount of work or the learning outcomes, and one for the personal importance of the topic, for instance. Sometimes students gave several reasons for choosing their favourites.

> *Bob Dylan merkitsee minulle hyvin paljon. Hänen musiikkinsa auttaa minua jaksamaan eteenpäin arkipäivän ankeudessa. Ihailen häntä sekä suurena runoilijana, että tavallisena ihmisenä. Näin ollen tämä työ kosketti minua henkilökohtaisesti enemmän kuin mikään muu. - -*
>
> *Ja tietenkin, onhan tänään Bob Dylanin syntymäpäivä! (005F)*
>
> Bob Dylan means a lot to me. His music helps me to go on in the gloominess of everyday life. I admire him both as a great poet and as an ordinary human being. Thus, this piece of work touched me personally more than any other piece. - -
>
> And, naturally, it is Bob Dylan's birthday today, as well. (005F)

> *Minulle itselleni oli tämä työni ehkä kaikista merkittävin. Näin jälkeenpäin on mielenkiintoista muistella miten se vähitellen kehittyi ja kehittyi; taulun aiheuttamista ajatuksista minun elämäni ensimmäiseksi lauluksi.*
>
> *Se on lyhyt ja se on omituinen, mutta se on minun oma luomukseni! (016F)*
>
> For myself this piece was perhaps the most important. Now, afterwards, it's interesting to recall how it gradually evolved and evolved; from the ideas inspired by a painting into the first song I have ever written in my life.
>
> It's short and it's weird but it is a creation of my own! (016F)

> *Choosing the subjects for my main projects wasn't really difficult. Amadeus has been a truly influential film in my life and I simply wanted to share my passion with others. The same description suits my personal commentary too. John Irving is my favourite author and I wanted to express my feelings of admiration towards him on paper. The film review is my favourite. I think I succeeded in nailing down my thoughts about the film quite nicely. (010F)*

> *This is my personal favourite. I have had many memorable moments with his books. This is also the one, which I had most difficulties with. I had problems finding enough material to write from. I enjoyed myself searching information. This is the best 'cos Tolkien's books have had so tremendous influence on me. (105M)*

> *When I did this work I learned a lot, but the most important thing is that I realised that I have loving friend somewhere in USA. (033F)*

The language of the piece, either its style, fluency or grammatical accuracy, was also mentioned in a few cases. However, the personal relevance of the piece clearly both outnumbered and outweighed grammatical accuracy as a criterion for selection.

> *Ajatellen aiheen omaperäisyyttä minulle, päätin valita sen päätyökseni. Lisäksi työ oli ehkä kielellisesti puhtain eikä virheitä ollut paljon (toivottavasti). (095M)*
> Thinking of the originality of the topic to me, I decided to choose it as my main piece. In addition, the piece was languagewise perhaps the cleanest and there weren't very many mistakes (I hope). (095M)

> *A poster of Peanuts was the most comfortable to do and it came nice. The poster includes a few grammarmistakes but it isn't so important. Life goes on. (015F)*

## Students' reflections in the epilogues

The last piece to be included in the final portfolio was *an epilogue* summing up the student's reflections on his or her learning and on the portfolio course in general. To scaffold both the self-assessments and summative reflections, the students were given some questions that they could use as a starting point for their assessments (see Appendix 3).

In their evaluations, most students – regardless of their prior success in English – considered the course a positive and encouraging experience, if yet also a demanding one. Nonetheless, some students clearly stated that they had not liked the portfolio approach at all.

> *Epilogi*
> *I really enjoued working this way cause the opportunity for doing things that I really like. What I think I learned doing this, was how to think in English. I think that these kind of tasks*

> *schould be offered more often cause it really motivates and helps you in your later life. What can be a better teatcher of grammar than the language itself. Anyway I'd like to continue doing these later on in my studys.*
>
> *What I feel about my portfolio works you can find from my reviews. (054F)*

Since the students' reflections on the portfolio course and its advantages and disadvantages are of vital importance for this study as an illuminative evaluation, they will be considered more thoroughly in Chapter 4.

## Portfolio celebrations at the end of the course

The time allotted to an English test was dedicated to a portfolio celebration. There, each student presented his or her portfolio to the class. Some students presented all the pieces, some concentrated on one or two pieces that they considered the most important.

The students were given the choice to present their portfolios either in English or in Finnish. Some students insisted on speaking Finnish because they considered speaking English in front of the group either too difficult or too intimidating. Although some students might have liked to present their work in English, all students decided to present their work in Finnish.

The choice of the language was based on our wish to encourage all students to tell about their work: every student regardless of their skills of spoken English would have a more or less equal chance to tell about their work. Thus, everyone would have an idea of the totality of the work produced in the group. That way, the portfolio celebration would meet the goals set to it: to offer a social learning situation where the students could learn from each other and their work, and to give a forum where all students could get supportive assessment from their peers.

> *Friday the 27th*
> *Yesterday was the day when everyone talked about their portfolios. It was exciting. We all had so great portfolios! It must be hard to critizise and deside witch is better than the other. (061F)*

# Portfolios as the assessment tool for the course

## Teachers assessing the portfolios

Finally, the showcase portfolio was assessed by the teacher according to the criteria discussed at the beginning of the course. The students' course grades were solely based on their portfolios – no other tests or examinations were taken during the course.

First of all, the portfolios were graded holistically. In other words, the pieces were not graded separately, but the whole portfolio was given one grade. In many cases, the teachers found it difficult and even frustrating to grade the portfolios: how to transform all the work, effort, and creativity into a single grade? The teachers and I discussed the criteria and some possible problems of assessment together before the grading. In some problematic cases, we also discussed the student's grade together. Nevertheless, the assessment was often complicated.

One problem we encountered was how to balance effort and language proficiency in the final grading. What if the language of the student's pieces of work was very accurate and fluent but their content as well as the student's involvement in his or her work were rather poor? Or, if the student had really invested a lot of time and effort, but because of limited language proficiency, the language of the pieces was not very good? How to define the holistic grade if the student's pieces of work were rather uneven in quality? Furthermore, the comparability of portfolio grades puzzled us: should each portfolio have been compared to other students' portfolios or to the student's own earlier performance? (See Pollari et al. 1996, 171–173.)

Therefore, in addition to the grade, the teacher gave a more comprehensive descriptive assessment of the portfolio focussing on its strengths but also pointing out possible areas for improvement. In order to remember to comment on all the major issues of assessment, the pilot group teacher had designed a verbal assessment form for herself. At the end of the course, all the teachers decided to use the form (see Appendix 4).

The writing of the descriptive assessments took a great deal of time. Päivi Ahlroos, who had altogether 68 portfolios to assess and comment, gave the grade at the end of the course but wrote the assessments during the summer.

Later on, at the beginning of the autumn term, her groups got the narrative assessments and also revisited their portfolios. Nonetheless, the descriptive assessment, even though it took a great deal of the teachers' time, was considered very important both by the teachers and students.

After the assessment procedure the portfolios were returned to their rightful owners, the students. Before that, the portfolios were photocopied and some pieces of work were photographed or copied on audio or video tapes for the purposes of this study.

## Students' reflections on portfolios as an assessment tool

One of the questions given to the students as a starting point for their self-assessments and epilogues was how they would have liked their portfolios to be assessed. Quite a few students reacted to that prompt.

In accordance with the criteria agreed on at the beginning of the course, most students seemed to emphasize the effort and amount of work as well as the content of the pieces as main criteria. In general, they were considered more important than the accuracy of the language.

> *I wish that people see how much I try. I really made my best. I am not so good in English but this is the best what I can do. I wish teacher reward my hard working and don't care so much my writing falls.* (033F)

> *I hope that works will judge on the my level. I know I am not good english writer but I did my best.* (068F)

> *I hope that my works will be estimated according to their include and the working, (I mean how much I've done for them) Not only according to lingual accuracy.* (080F)

> *My stories aren't very long. I don't explain much or tell everything I know about the theme. But long stories aren't necessarily better than short ones. The contents after all is essential, isn't it?* (079F)

Some students also wanted the teacher to keep the totality in mind when evaluating the portfolios. Some also wanted to remind the teacher that this was the first portfolio they had ever made in case it was not exactly what had been expected. In general, many students wanted their portfolios to tell more about them than just about their language proficiency. A few students also acknowledged the complexity of the assessment of their portfolios.

> *I hope my portfolio works will be judged by looking at the whole instead of pointing out for example word correctiveness. And I also like to point out that this is my first portfolio I have ever done. (038M)*

> *I hope that this portfolio gives a pleasant image of me. I would like this works tell that I'm a bit kind of artist and that I am not slovenly when it comes to works I like to do. When estimating this portfolio you could look at the work in its entirety insted of looking at it in detail. (061F)*

> *I hope these works will tell some good sides from me, which don't appear in everyday life. When evaluating my works I'd like you to remember that the length is not the most important thing. It matters more how and what you have written. I don't envy at all the ones who have to judge which grades these works will deserve. (105M)*

However, some students did not wish their portfolios to be taken as portraits of themselves but only as pieces of text. A few students also hoped that the teacher would assess the products only, not the working process.

> *There might be a lot of spelling miss-steaks, but there are a lot of words, and most of them are right (I hope...), so I'm expecting the "perfect portfolio" -title. No, seriously, I don't know how my works should be evaluated. They are just pieces of text, and should be considered as such. (056M)*

> *Now when all my works are ready, I hope that you just look works, not the whole working proces because was a total chaos. (095M)*

Two or three students were also sceptical about the appropriateness of the assessment criteria for a course of English.

> *The portfolio has two viewpoints to it, students that are not good in English can get good grades although their lingual skills are weak, but good students (like me) can't get good grades even if their lingual skills are excellent (like mine) because the grades are given by the student's creativity (or so I have understood). I've never been a particularly creative person and I have difficulties writing essays in Finnish, so how could I write stories in English that are different from usual, normal essays that everybody writes. I feel that I'm more of an English-speaking person than a creative person. It's not fair that I'm unable to get a good grade in English because I'm not creative and so on. After all were supposed to be studying English and get grades according to our lingual skills.*
>
> *(Sense the bitterness, but everything is not to be taken too seriously) (050M)*

> *Missään kurssin vaiheessa en päässyt täysin selvyyteen mitä arviointiperusteet todellakin pitävät sisällään. Kuinka paljon kiitettävään arvosanaan vaaditaan kielen osaamista? Töiden monipuolisuus, sisältö, sujuva ja rikas kielen käyttö ja kielivirheiden vähyys sekä ulkoasun siisteys ovat mielestäni päteviä arvosteluperusteita. Kuinka paljon siis vaikuttaa työhön piirretty taideteos? (010F)*
>
> I didn't quite understand the assessment criteria and what they included at any point of the course. How much language proficiency is needed for a very good grade? The diversity, content, fluent and rich use of language and scarcity of language mistakes as well as the neatness of the appearance of the pieces of work are, in my opinion, valid assessment criteria. But how much does a piece of artwork drawn on the piece affect the grade? (010F)

One or two students also criticized the assessment method because they suspected that many students invested a great deal of effort only because of the grade:

> *Koska työmäärä on valtava, oppilaat tekevät työt väärällä perusteella (pakko), pelkän arvosanan takia. Oliko tämä tarkoitus? (027F)*
>
> Because the amount of work is enormous, students produce the work on the wrong pretext (must), only for the grade. Was that the purpose? (027F)

This did not seem to be the case, however. In general, most students seemed pleased with the opportunity to show their effort, interest and involvement as well as their responsibility through their work and, furthermore, to be assessed based on these criteria and not only on their language proficiency. For some students the grade did not even seem to be the most important accomplishment of the course: accomplishing their own goals and being proud of their own work, effort and learning outweighed the grade.

> *I have wondered how my works will be evaluated but right now it doesn't make any differense. The most important thing is that I have succeeded in one way or another and even if I don't get a 10 from this course I'm not disappointed. I have already given myself a 10 from trying and crossing my limits. And the most important thing is that I am satisfied with my works and proud of them! (089F)*

CHAPTER 4

# The evaluation of the portfolio process

The following evaluation of the portfolio process is twofold. Firstly, the evaluation refers back to some features of the process that proved problematic. An attempt will be made to analyse those problems and their reasons but also to consider possible alternative solutions. In other words, in addition to the analysis and discussion of the problems, the evaluation aims at practical suggestions that might help other teachers interested in using portfolios in their teaching. Although the first part deals with the innovation mainly from the teachers' and the researcher's perspective, the students' comments and reflections, naturally, form the foundation for the considerations below

The second part will deal with students' reflections and comments on portfolios as a learning and assessment tool in general as well as with their opinions on the suitability of the portfolio approach for the purposes of this particular course of English. Furthermore, the second part will focus on the students' reflections on their own learning during the course. The students' comments on their learning are divided into two categories, namely their comments dealing with issues concerning learner empowerment and issues concerning their language learning and lingual empowerment.

## Some problems of the portfolio process revisited

As discussed above, certain difficulties were encountered during the experiment. For instance, the beginning of the course appeared to be crucial for the course: more work would have been needed to get the students convinced and reassured of the goals and the raison d'être of the portfolio approach. Furthermore, the definition of culture would have required more consideration and negotiation. Some students would have benefitted from more individualized guidance, support and conferencing not only when they were setting their goals and choosing topics for their work, but also throughout the whole course. In addition, the teachers considered the final assessment to be problematic. As all this is linked with the question of empowerment, these problems will be discussed below.

## Defining the portfolio approach and its raison d'être

For most of the students participating in the portfolio programme, the portfolio approach and its concrete effects on their studying came as a surprise at the very beginning of the course: the decision to participate in the programme was made by the teacher, not by the students. Therefore, a fundamental problem with empowerment in our experiment was that the portfolio approach was forced upon all participating students. In other words, the students were disempowered in the sense that they were not given the power to decide for themselves whether they wanted to participate or not. However, in a school context, and in many other real world contexts as well, this is often the case.

Nonetheless, from the empowerment perspective, the students would have deserved a more thorough explanation of the portfolio approach, its reasons and believed benefits. They should also have been given more learner training. The difficulty was how to optimize this in practice: a lecture about learning theories and the portfolio approach would not necessarily have met its audience and their needs, nor would we have had enough time for proper learner training sessions concerning self-direction, for instance. Furthermore, most students seemed content with the brief introduction and wanted to start working as soon as possible. Nevertheless, the students who found the portfolio approach the least inviting would have needed more guidance, reassurance and support. In short, they would have needed more resources but also good reasons and reassurance to build up their interest and willingness to assume the freedom and responsibility handed to them: empowerment clearly seems to require "a personal 'will' or belief that it is possible and desirable"

(Braye & Preston-Shoot 1995, 114).

However, the students who needed more help and reassurance did not necessarily voice their doubts or problems: sometimes they even assured the inquiring teacher that everything was under control. It is possible that the portfolio course seemed too laborious or face-threatening to some students. These students may have felt that they could not cope with the requirements or that the course would not be of benefit to them or their goals. Therefore, to save themselves from unpleasant experiences that might threaten their self-esteem or from too much unnecessary and unbeneficial work, they decided not to get involved and take responsibility: "if one does not even try, the lack of success cannot be attributed to the lack of one's capacity" (Järvelä & Niemivirta 1997, 226). On the other hand, some students assumed their responsibility very seriously, but were distressed and anxious because they felt that the portfolio course was beyond their capacities. Thus, we should have discussed the course, its meaning and goals as well as requirements and criteria with the students in personal conferences, for instance, in order to guide, motivate and reassure them individually and personally. Then, perhaps, the reluctant or distressed students could have found something positive or interesting in the course, which could have helped them get involved and engaged in the portfolio work (cf. Järvelä & Niemivirta 1997).

Particularly in one of the participating teaching groups, initial reassurance and winning over of the reluctant students might have changed the atmosphere of the whole course. There, the prevailing negative attitude towards the portfolio course probably affected some students who otherwise might have been more interested (cf. Järvelä & Niemivirta 1997). Consequently, most of the students who found the course an unpleasant experience were in this group. In the other three groups the attitude towards portfolios was clearly more positive from the beginning till the end.

## The definition of culture

The way in which culture was defined was a factor that caused difficulties both initially and also later on during the course. Some students may have found the course uninviting because of the theme: since they felt that they did not like culture, they consequently felt that they could not like the course or succeed in its work. Thus, some students refused to become involved and be responsible. If they had had a chance to start with a piece dealing with their interests, for instance sports, it might have made the beginning more inviting for them, and having produced the first piece, perhaps they would have experienced the rest of the course also easier or more interesting, even if they would have had to produce the remaining pieces on culture.

The definition of culture had also more ethical consequences from the empowerment perspective. Some students produced work on topics, for instance sports, studying or tourism, which we teachers did not regard as part of culture as defined for the culture course. However, we welcomed a number of topics as original extensions of culture, although they did not fall within any of the categories mentioned in the *Framework curriculum for the senior secondary school* (1994). Thus, the teachers and I ultimately decided which topics were appropriate and dealt with culture using the official curricular framework as our guideline. However, the main goal of this experiment was to foster the students' empowerment. As the learners' active and responsible role and their acknowledged decision-making power and control are embedded in the idea of empowerment, should the students not have been allowed to define the concept themselves?

On the other hand, it could perhaps be argued that the teachers should retain some ultimate decision-making power in order to foster and scaffold empowerment. Students would be allowed to try out their own ideas and their readiness for self-direction within some given boundaries and thus build up their empowerment - both their power and resources – gradually. The teacher would have the last word but also the final responsibility. Would this constitute gradual release of responsibility (cf. Pearson & Fielding 1991, 818; Linnakylä 1994, 18–19)?

The above suggestion sounds very reasonable. Yet, if students were to be given some clear-cut definition of culture to follow, how about the extensions of culture which the teacher might regard as excellent? Could the teacher alone decide which extensions are appropriate and which are not? In other words, should we have adopted the policy of not accepting any topics which did not fall within some clear category of culture? This seems rather easy and safe from the teacher's perspective but not very productive or empowering for the student or for the whole course. Some of the work that the students produced, most of which we considered very good, would have been impossible to classify according to any rigid categories. First of all, many pieces were integrative and thus difficult to categorize. For instance, *Kullervo in Finnish Arts* (017M) integrated both literature, music and visual arts, and the songs that students wrote themselves were both pieces of poetry and pieces of music. Furthermore, some students produced portfolios which we considered excellent but which actually should not have been accepted at all if we had interpreted our requirements strictly. For instance, one student produced two pieces dealing with dancing (her own biography as a dancer and a portrait of Isadora Duncan) and two pieces dealing mainly with poetry (her own poem-turned-song and a portrait of Emily Dickinson). Furthermore, two of these pieces were portraits of a person and her art. Thus, categorically speaking, the student's work did not fulfil the requirements of all pieces dealing with different areas of culture and all pieces being of a different type. Yet, the portfolio was unanimously considered exquisite. Therefore, if preset rules had been applied too tightly, it would have caused a serious breach of empowerment in many cases.

In consequence, I believe that probably the best way to foster empowerment is to let students make their own decisions and help them when help is needed. Students need some boundaries and guidelines, but latitude and flexibility should also be given. Furthermore, decisions on the appropriateness of a topic should be reached through negotiation with the student. This was also what we aimed at, but as some students never consulted us about their topics, this could not be done in all cases. Also partly for this reason, we took a rather liberal attitude towards accepting students' portfolio pieces even if we did not consider the topic completely fitting for our expectations or for our definition of culture.

## Getting started: students planning and starting their work

Another problem that some students encountered, which was also closely linked with the definition of culture, was the difficulty of coming up with ideas for their own pieces of work. Some students kept on thinking about possible topics and forms of work so long that eventually they were in a terrible rush to produce their work. Although we tried to empower students through giving them resources – ideas and materials as basis for their work – this was not always enough. One reason may have been that those students really were not interested in any forms of culture, or that they were not interested in self-directed work. Perhaps some of them wanted to leave all the decision-making power and also all the responsibility to the teacher. Perhaps they were either so accustomed to teacher-directed teaching or had negative expectations of student-directed studying that they did not know how to proceed with their work (cf. e.g. Rogers 1983; Hiemstra & Sisco 1990; Ho & Crookall 1995). Or, perhaps, they wanted to take it easy: saying that they were planning their work gave them a legitimate reason for not doing anything concrete.

On the hindsight, in order to avoid some of these problems, it would perhaps have been wise to ask all the students to write down some possible ideas for their work and then discuss their ideas with the teacher and, after that, advise students to start working on the one they found the most inviting. The ideas for the remaining pieces would very likely come later along the way: for instance, the students could get ideas from their peers or from the teachers or from the materials they would come up with when producing the first pieces. This way, the students would all have started working early on in the course.

The idea of a learning contract, which did not materialize during our portfolio course, could also have been realized at least partially. In this case, the students would probably have discussed their ideas more with the teacher in order to have their plans accepted and, thus, avoided possible later misunderstandings or disagreements on what was expected of their work. In the learning contract discussion the teacher could have helped and guided the students who seemed to be lost by asking about their interests, and by giving them more background materials and ideas. The teacher could also have discussed the requirements and criteria for the portfolio as well as culture as a theme if they did not seem to be understood. Naturally, this was our intention but somehow in the real situations it did not work out quite as nicely as planned.

## Working logs

Although logbooks sometimes proved problematic, I believe that keeping a log could also foster empowerment. Firstly, it may promote awareness raising and students' metacognitive skills: the students have to pay more attention to the things they do and the ways they study. Preferably, they may also think about why they work the way they do and perhaps seek alternative ways and strategies as well. Also, upon getting information from their logs, the teacher can possibly see some problem areas and then guide the students in their work on the basis of their individual learning needs. For instance, in our experiment quite a few students seemed to write their texts first in Finnish and then translate the texts into English even though they found translating very difficult. In these cases, the teacher could have suggested other writing strategies.

Secondly, keeping a log and discussing it may also promote process-orientation: the work might be seen as a longer working and learning process leading to a finished piece and not as an end-product only (Bailey 1990; Porter et al. 1990; cf. De Fina 1992, 31–33). Thirdly, analyzing and discussing the journal entries could also enhance interaction and co-operation in the classroom between the students and the teacher (see Porter et al. 1990; Bailey 1990) and thus foster empowerment through real participation and negotiation.

Accordingly, in order to fully benefit from keeping the logs, the students should have discussed their working processes with their teachers. Therefore, the teachers should have had opportunities to see the logs during the process, not only afterwards. However, in a course this short this seemed difficult to arrange: if the teacher had taken the journals to check them for a week – as class conferences were held once a week – the students could not have written in them during that time. During a class conference session there simply was not enough time to go through all the diaries, not at least in the groups of 30 students or more. An additional problem was that some students often forgot their logs at home. A possible solution could have been that the teacher would have checked some logs every week so that eventually she would have seen them all. That way she might have had an opportunity to follow the process more closely and perhaps guide and help students with their problems at hand.

However, as beneficial as a working log or learning journal can be, a question worth thinking about is that perhaps some students just are not diary-keepers: should they be forced to keep a logbook? Should they be 'punished' for not writing sufficient entries in their logs if they otherwise work well? In our portfolio programme, having seen the vast spectrum of working logs, we decided to mention the logs in the descriptive assessment but not really penalize anybody for not having kept a working log 'properly', especially if their work was otherwise good.

## More support for the individual working processes

Albeit the students were encouraged to come and ask the teacher for help, some students never sought any advice, assistance or feedback during the portfolio programme even if they had trouble with their work. Some students even refused to show their work in progress to the teacher. In such cases the support provided to foster empowerment did not seem to be sufficient or appropriate for these particular students and their needs and expectations. Learner expectations of the teacher's authority and the teacher's responsibility for the students' learning play a central role in the process of transferring responsibility to the learners themselves (Cotterall 1995). Learners who expect the teacher to make decisions about their learning and studying "do not correspond to the profile of the autonomous learner" (Cotterall 1995, 197). Consequently, the students who did not seek help or advice might perhaps have needed more concrete and teacher-directed support and monitoring – i.e. more gradual release of responsibility (Pearson & Fielding 1991; Linnakylä 1994) – in order to get appropriate help and resources in their processes of becoming more empowered and autonomous.

Individual conferences with the teacher might have offered additional support for some students. Many portfolio writers and teachers consider teacher-student conferencing a rewarding and beneficial yet a rather time-consuming form of conferencing. In addition to the student's work, the working logs could have been discussed there. Thus, the conferences could have provided a forum for discussing problems emerging from the process as well as a forum for personal feedback. Individual conferencing is often used in addition to class conferencing since one or two individual conferences per student hardly provide enough support for a longer working and learning process.

The problem in our case was time: the portfolio course was short, only about seven weeks and altogether about 30 to 35 lessons. Thus, if conferences had taken approximately 30 minutes each, it would have taken a great deal of the teacher's time. Furthermore, because of practical constraints alone, it would have been impossible for the teacher to organize sessions with 68 students. However, in smaller groups, with approximately 20 students, it could have been possible. In our case, a feasible way to organize conferencing could have been to have some class conferences at the beginning and also at the end of the course, and then also organize some individual sessions for the students who either wanted individual conferencing or the ones whom the teacher considered in need of additional support. Some conferences could also have been small group conferences between the teacher and two or three students. Thus, as processes of empowerment turned out to be very individual, fostering empowerment would also have been more individualized than it was in our approach.

## The final assessment

As discussed above in Chapter 3 the teachers found the final grading very difficult for a number of reasons. When viewed from the empowerment perspective, another problem emerged: the assessment procedure was not a completely negotiated process. Firstly, although the requirements and criteria were known to all students from the very beginning and they were also discussed and elaborated in the classroom, they were ultimately given to the students. Yet, the students had a chance to comment on the criteria and to accept or reject them, and also perhaps change them if they wanted. Every student seemed to accept the criteria. Furthermore, the students' comments were also taken into consideration when the requirements were reset: in two teaching groups the teacher decided to lower the number of required work from five to four because of the students well-reasoned requests. Thus, there was some negotiation in the process.

Compared to traditional assessment methods, the students had an active role in the assessment. First, they chose the pieces of work for the final assessment. The students also stated their own criteria for the selection. The purpose of the rationale and criteria was to help the teacher to see the meaning of the selected pieces to the learners and to their learning. The students' own criteria thus had an important role in the assessment, and they often also guided and helped the final grading. The students were also welcome to suggest a grade for themselves: in the final questionnaire they were also asked what grade they would give for themselves and why. Yet, the students did not have any legitimate power in the final decision on their grades.

One of the teachers suggested that perhaps the grade could be a mean of the student's own suggestion and the teacher's suggestion (see Pollari et al. 1996, 172). Or perhaps the grade should be negotiated in an individual assessment conference between the student and the teacher as sometimes has been the case (see e.g. Pollari 1994c). Thus, the students would have a more explicitly powerful role in the final assessment.

Both of the suggestions are good but complex to implement. First of all, individual assessment discussions would require time. In our experiment, the course taking place in the last period before summer, we should have shifted the deadline dates earlier to allow the teacher enough time to first read and assess the portfolios and then to confer with the students. This would have shortened the time which the students had for their work. Furthermore, for the teacher who had 68 students at the same time, individual assessment conferences would have been impossible to organize. Secondly, some critics have suspected that some students would abuse their power and, knowing that the grade would be a mean of the teacher's suggestion and theirs, would give themselves clearly too high grades. Some students also seem to be reluctant to grade their own work either because they do not feel that they are competent to do it – they feel that it is the teacher's task – or because they do not want to praise their own work.

Perhaps a feasible compromise could be to ask the students to give their suggestions for the grades and their arguments for them in the epilogues. Then, the teacher would take the suggestion and its rationale into account when deciding on the final grade. Yet, the final power would reside with the teacher. In this way, the teacher could try to secure the reliability of the grading. Albeit not being a completely negotiated process, the assessment procedure would give the students more acknowledged power. It would also scaffold and secure the process of assessment and the process of empowerment through some guidelines and security measures. Naturally, the grading process would still be open to many problems and controversies, but it would be more negotiated and more empowering than grading traditionally is.

## Students' reflections on the portfolio approach and its effects

The students were asked to reflect on their learning and their experiences and opinions about the portfolio approach in their epilogues. However, in addition to reflecting on these matters in their epilogues, many students gave invaluable opinions, ideas and comments also in their working logs, prologues and self-assessments. Therefore, in this evaluation the students' comments are extracted from all of these sources of data.

## Students' opinions about the portfolio approach

At the portfolio celebrations, all students present were asked the following, hypothetical question: "If you had had all the knowledge and experience of portfolios and of this course that you have now, would you have chosen this portfolio course or an 'ordinary', more teacher- and textbook-directed course?" The students were also asked to write their comments on the course and its portfolio approach in the final questionnaire which they answered during the portfolio celebration. The answers were consistent with the hands-up votes.

According to the hands-up votes and the comments in the questionnaires, the clear majority of the students would have chosen the portfolio approach. There were, however, considerable differences between the teaching groups. Whereas only one student at the Teacher Training School would definitely have chosen an ordinary course, roughly half of the students in one of the Kesy groups would have preferred a 'normal' course. In the other Kesy group, the students were clearly, even if not unanimously, in favour of the portfolio course. Furthermore, there was a clear difference between the girls' and boys' reactions: circa 75 % of the students who did not like the course were boys.

The answers may have been slightly affected by the facts that some Teacher Training School students who had had problems with their portfolios were not present at the portfolio celebration, and that some Kesy students still had a great deal of work to do as their portfolio celebrations were two or three days before the deadline. Later on, having managed to complete their portfolios, some Kesy students changed their minds and considered the course a more positive experience than they had previously said. Nevertheless, according to the students' comments in their portfolios, the difference between this particular Kesy group and all the other three groups in their general attitudes towards the portfolio approach still clearly prevailed.

Nevertheless, in total, a clear majority of students – regardless of their prior success in English – seemed to consider the portfolio approach a positive and encouraging, even empowering, experience. These students' degree of enthusiasm towards portfolios varied from slightly positive to very positive, for instance,

> *Minusta tämä portfoliokurssi on ollut aika rankka. Toisaalta tämä kurssi on antanut paljon. (006F)*
> In my opinion, this portfolio course has been pretty distressing. On the other hand, it has given a lot. (006F)
>
> *Studying have been fun. (036F)*
>
> *A VERY NICE COURSE. THANK YOU! (097F)*

Furthermore, the reasons for their positive attitudes varied:

> *I'm glad we decided to do something new instead of doing the same things year after another. This was absolutely worth doing. (105M)*
>
> *I really liked working this way 'cause it gives me the freedom I need to be creative. (031M)*
>
> *My portfolio is now ready! I really enjoyed this course even if it was sometimes hard to keep working. Thank you for this chance to work independently! (081F)*
>
> *Kurssin suorittaminen itsenäisesti on kaiken kaikkiaan todella hyvä. Opiskelu on intensiivistä ja omaehtoista, joten oppiminenkin on ehkä vähän eri luokkaa kuin työkirjatehtäviä tehdessä. (079F)*
> To study a course independently is all in all a really good thing. Studying is intensive and student-directed and, so, also learning is probably a bit more intensive than when doing workbook exercises. (079F)
>
> *Tällainen työmuoto opetti meitä työskentelemään itsenäisesti, joka minusta on hyvä, kun ajattelee lukion jälkeistä opiskeluamme. (059F)*
> This kind of working method taught us to work independently, which in my opinion is good when you think of our studies after the upper secondary school. (059F)

As can be seen in the comments above, the portfolio approach offered some students a welcomed break from ordinary classroom routines. For some, it gave an opportunity to pursue their own interests. For some, it provided a vehicle for creativity and self-expression. Furthermore, portfolios gave a chance for independence and self-direction. All these features made studying probably more relevant and also more personal for the students. In other words, the portfolio approach seemed to foster these students' empowerment at various levels and in different issues.

However, the portfolio course was also considered demanding, and the teachers were cautioned against getting too enthusiastic about portfolios. For instance, the idea of having two or three portfolio courses either simultaneously or in a row horrified some of the students. Accordingly, some students suggested that portfolios should be optional.

> *I think portfolio is, at the end, good thing. But only when it's given as a special project. If every school subject begins to use it, the idea loses it's charm.* (043M)

Naturally, there were a few students who did not like the course at all. The course was demanding, and even too demanding for some students. Also, regardless of the teacher's or other students' assistance, the freedom in and responsibility for one's own work caused some problems. Furthermore, a few students never quite realized the diversity of cultural topics.

> *Portfoliotyöskentely oli minulle uusi kokemus, josta jäi enemmän negatiivisia kuin positiivisia ajatuksia. Positiivista oli se, että sanavarasto karttui ja oppi täydentämään englannin kieltään. Kaikki muu oli negatiivista. Minä en tykännyt tästä systeemistä yhtään. Tulee liian paljon töitä yhdellä kertaa. Muut voivat olla toista mieltä mutta tämä on minun mielipide. Olisi parempi jos opetettaisiin opettajajohtoisesti niin säästyisi paljon vaivaa.* (107M)
> Portfolio work was a new experience to me which left more negative than positive feelings. What was positive was that my vocabulary grew and I learnt to complement my English skills. All the rest was negative. I didn't like this system at all. Too much work all at once. The others may think otherwise but this is my opinion. It would be better if teaching was teacher-directed so it would save a lot of trouble. (107M)

> *And what it comes to studying English I would rather do a normal course of English, instead of this hell of games without proper rules.* (013M)

> *I didn't like yhis job in the begin and I don't still like it because I'm not keen in literature.* (077M)

## Students' reflections on their learning

### *Portfolios and learning to use English*

When reflecting on their learning in their self-assessments and epilogues, many students expressed that they had learnt practical skills in English, or learnt to use the language for communication. Several students said that their writing skills had improved. For example, process writing and giving and getting feedback on work in progress were new experiences to some students, at least as part of their English studies. Many students also mentioned that they had learnt to use dictionaries and other sources more readily in their work. Quite a few students said that reading plenty of different authentic materials had improved their reading skills in English.

> *This portfolio working was quite an good idea. It teachs you to write and, if you want, speak. - - This gives students an opportunity to direct their learning to those areas that they feel important for themselves. (065M)*
>
> *Tämä on hyvä opetusmuoto, sillä tärkeintähän ei ole kielioppi vaan kielenkäyttö. (022M)*
> This is a good form of teaching because the most important thing is not the grammar but the use of language. (022M)
>
> *What I think I learned doing this, was how to think in English. I think that these kind of tasks schould be offered more often cause it really motivates and helps you later in your life. What can be a better teatcher of grammar than the language itself. (054F)*
>
> *In this work I learned to write more fluently. It's easy when you write about something you like to write about! (080F)*
>
> *I think my writing has improved a lot and my vocabulary has surely increased. (086F)*
>
> *I think that my skills have developed and I really have enjoyed to make works, because now I can see, what I have learnt. (087F)*

Some students also emphasized the importance of learning to use the language in practice: in this respect, foreign language education at school received some rather critical comments. Furthermore, it was considered very important to see what they can do with the language skills they have acquired.

*I also noticed that if I have a motiv to write I also can write. That's the problem in common kurs. Pupils are given some stupid essee themes which of they should write an essee which effects on school marks. But as far that previous mentioned way to teach writing is the most suitable way to do that. (065M)*

*Englanti on minulle vaikea aine lukiossa ja olen joutunut panostamaan siihen enemmän kuin useimpiin muihin aineisiin. Töiden tekeminen ja englannin taidon käyttö koulukirjojen ulkopuolella antaa varmasti innostusta myös ensi vuoden opiskeluun. Huomasin, että tarvitsen kielioppi rakenteiden käyttöä muulloinkin kuin työkirjan sivuja täytellessäni. (068F)*
English has been a difficult subject for me in the upper secondary school and I have had to invest more effort in it than in most other subjects. I'm sure that producing these pieces of work and using English skills outside schoolbooks will give incentive for my English studies next year. I noticed that I need grammatical structures also for something else than for filling in workbook exercises. (068F)

*I am concerned about the way how much teaching in schools is based on theory. You can learn a lot of linguistic delicacies but finally you find yourself in a situation that you don't dare to use them in practise. A skill to speak foreign language is a skill you don't learn by reading books. (What I am speaking? Everyone knows that.) (045M)*

*I've always been such good in english. I've never studied it very hard, but I've done quite well. But in the Lukio I've started to to get bored with studying english: these eleven years I've studied it, the methods have always been the same.*

*I've found this "culturecourse" quite refreshing. It's been very hard, and sometimes I thought that I couldn't do it, but I could. (080F)*

*The important thing that I liked in this project was the fact that at last I got to use the English I had learned and noticed that I really can do something with it. I hope that it has couraged everybody to believe in their own capability to use their skills and not to be so skared of making mistakes. - -*

*Hopefully in the future the teachers who teach languages will also teach students to use them and not to be afread of making mistakes. (101F)*

Moreover, many students commented that they liked the course because it enabled them to use their skills of English and to work at their own level. In other words, students had a chance to set goals that they considered suitable and also attainable.

*This was a challenging job to do. I spent many hours with my projects. My portfolio looked quite good, I know there's a lot of mistakes but I tried my best. (026M)*

> *Parasta oli, että juttujen aiheet sai päätää itse, näin niistä sai itselleen kiinnostavia.- - Myös todella positiivista oli se että sai itse päättää oman vaikeus tasonsa eikä opettaja sitä määrännyt: uskon että ainakin minä löysin itselleni sopivan tason ja hyödyin töistäni. (020F)*
> The best part was that we could decide the topics of our pieces for ourselves, that way we could make them interesting to us. - - Another really positive thing was that we could decide our own level of difficulty for ourselves and it wasn't given by the teacher: at least I believe that I found a level suitable for me and benefitted from my work. (020F)

> *The portfolio course has given a fair chance for us to show that we can be creative and good in English even if we don't always get perfect marks. (081F)*

Many students also felt that they were more willing to communicate in English and probably not as afraid of making mistakes as earlier. Feelings of having accomplished something and succeeding in their work at their own level motivated students: some even told that this was the first time in years that they had enjoyed studying English at school. In all these cases, portfolios really seemed to provide a vehicle for students' lingual empowerment.

> *Satu ei varmasti myöskään kieliopillisesti ole mallisuoritus, mutta sen tekeminen oli uskomaton kokemus. En koskaan ennen ole harjoitellut kieltä tällä tavalla. - - Työn tuloksen kuunteleminen sai aikaan kivan tunteen: minäkö tosiaan olen saanut tuon aikaiseksi. (035F)*
> The fairytale certainly isn't a grammatical model performance but making it was an incredible experience. I had never before practised language that way. - - Listening to the piece gave a nice feeling: have I really created that myself. (035F)

> *Itselleni tämä työ antoi hurjasti itseluottamusta ja tuli sellainen olo, että edes jotain osaa, vaikka numerot ovatkin niin huonoja. - -*
> *P.S. Opiskeluinto kasvoi hurjasti. (097F)*
> For myself, this work gave a lot of self-confidence and I began to feel that I can do at least something in English even though my grades are so poor. - -
> P.S. Motivation to study grew immensely. (097F)

However, quite a few students were doubtful about the effectiveness of learning. For example, a few students said that because they had only had one or two grammar lessons, they had not really learnt anything new in English. Even if they said that their reading, writing and use of source materials and dictionaries had improved, they felt that they had not learnt English. These students seemed to regard proper learning as learning of *facts* – new words or grammar rules, for example – not as learning of *skills*. Some also said that they had not had enough practice in speaking English. If the student had not produced any oral work or had not used spoken English in the process, this undoubtedly was true. Class conferences could have offered a forum for spoken English but, for a number of reasons, most students seemed to mainly speak Finnish during the class conferences.

Sometimes the students' comments about their learning were quite contradictory and inconsistent:

> *Mielestäni tämä projekti oli erittäin huono, koska meillä ei ollut yhtään oppituntia, missä olisi voinut oppia paljon enemmän, kuin tekemällä näitä tyhmiä portfolioita. Koska meillä ei ollut yhtään tuntia niin opiskelu tässä jaksossa meni aivan hukkaan, vaikka me opittiin hiukan näitä töitä tekemällä.*
> *Olihan tässä sellaista hyvää, että opittiin tekemään englannin kielisiä työ projekteja. Ja kaikki oppi varmaankin uusia sanoja, mitä he eivät kumminkaan käytä tavallisessa puhekielessä.*
> *Minulle tämä kurssi antoi vanhan kertausta. Se oli ihan hyvä, koska nämä taidot oli päässyt ruostmaan viime vuodesta.* (024M)
> In my opinion, this project was very bad because we didn't have any proper lessons where you could have learned much more than by doing these stupid portfolios. Because we didn't have any proper lessons, studying was completely wasted in this period although we learned a little by doing these works.
> What was good in this was that we learned to do projects in English. And everybody must have learned some new words but they won't be using them in ordinary spoken language anyway.
> For myself, this course gave revision. That was quite good because these skills had become a little rusty from last year. (024M)

In addition, there were a few students who felt that they had learnt very little, if anything.

> *Kuten olen jo useammin kirjoittanut, en tykkää tästä portfoliokurssista. Minusta tuntuu, että en ole oppinut mitään – eli tämä on ollut ihan turhaa.* (071M)
> As I have written several times, I don't like this portfolio course. I feel that I haven't learned a thing – in other words, all this has been useless.(071M)

### *Portfolios and learning to take charge of one's work*

In addition to commenting on learning English, quite a few students said that they had learnt some other things and skills. For instance, several students said that the course had taught them to take charge of and accept responsibility for their own work. Some students also commented that the skills they had learnt during the portfolio course would probably help them in their future studies.

> *I think that this kurs has teach me to plan more of my doings. (065M)*
>
> *This course was very good. Not only because we didn't have lexons. I learnt to take care of those things myself. There was no teacher who told me what to do. (053M)*
>
> *Työ oli mielenkiintoista ja haastavaakin, sillä tässä työssä meille annettiin mahdollisuus katsoa mihin todella pystymme, mutta neuvoja oli kuitenkin saatavilla jos niitä sattui kaipaamaan. Tällainen työmuoto opetti meitä myös työskentelemään itsenäisesti, joka on minusta hyvä, kun ajattelee lukion jälkeistä opiskeluamme.*
> *Minulla on mielessä vain positiivisia asioita portfolio työskentelystä, koska koko idea oli minusta erittäin hyvä. (059F)*
> The work was interesting and also challenging because in this work we were given a chance to see what we can really do but advice was also available if we wanted advice. This kind of working method taught us to work independently, which I think is very good when you think of our studies after upper secondary school.
> I have only positive things to say about the portfolio approach because in my opinion the whole idea was very good. (059F)

Thus, the portfolio approach appeared to foster these students' learner empowerment in terms of teaching them study skills and giving them an opportunity for taking responsibility for, and charge of, their studies.

However, quite a few students considered the course nice but also very demanding because of its learner-centredness and self-direction:

> *This kind of working gave me more responsibility of my work. I also learned that there's never enough time. I thought in the beginning that there is enough time to write and do the work that was supposed to do. That was not the case. When I took it easily and wrote little bit of text on monday and some more on sunday, work never got finished. So I was in a real hurry in the end. But I love to be independent. Although I wouldn't resist if we had worked as usual. It would have been much easier that way! (102F)*

Having the power and responsibility for their work, many students set their goals very high, which caused some anxiety during the working process. For instance, there appeared to be a group of students who demanded from themselves and from their work much more than an ordinary course load or much more than we teachers would ever have expected. Thus, some students seemed to take their learner empowerment perhaps too seriously.

Nonetheless, there were also students who did not like self-direction and who did not want to assume responsibility for their learning. Some of these students felt that they were not capable of working self-directedly, but yet they tried hard. On the other hand, there were also some students who dismissed their responsibility by saying that self-direction was not the way things were to be done at school.

CHAPTER 5

# Summary and discussion of the portfolio programme

The process of implementing the portfolio approach proved very interesting and rewarding but not necessarily easy. Thus, the overall findings of our portfolio programme proved quite consistent with the results of other foreign language portfolio experiments as well as with many other portfolio experiments in general.

Perhaps the most fundamental feature of the present portfolio innovation was the change in the students' role. The more active and responsible learner role was also the most crucial feature from the empowerment perspective. The students were given more decision-making power on their own work and, at the same time, they were also made accountable for their own actions. Yet, in a rather disempowering fashion, the students were not asked whether they wanted to have such a role and responsibility or not. However, most students were ready and willing to assume the new role in quite an empowered manner. These students set goals and topics which they saw suitable for their own learning goals, needs and interests and wanted to start working in a self-directed way. Nonetheless, some students had a great deal of trouble with their new role. Hence, the most fundamental change which was considered an empowering opportunity by a great many students was also, at the same time, regarded as a fundamental problem by some students.

Interestingly, the students seemed to consider the features of the portfolio programme in a very different way. For instance, despite the guidelines given, students seemed to define culture very differently: some considered the topic area wide and inspiring whereas some considered it very limited and difficult.

In consequence, some students had difficulties in finding interesting topics to work on. Furthermore, while some students wanted even less teacher control and more power to decide on their own work and its schedule, some students clearly needed and wanted stricter control and teacher-direction. Monitoring and controlling students' individual working processes both through their working logs and through observation and individual contacts also proved more problematic than was perhaps expected. Because of the students' different expectations and also because of various practical constraints, ranging from the lack of time to the fact that some students often forgot their work in progress and their working logs at home, the students' working processes could not be monitored, controlled and supported as individually as desirable.

Thus, as also noted in many other portfolio experiments (see e.g. Kauppinen et al. 1994; Smith 1995; Mäntylä 1996), the students' preparedness and willingness to assume a new, more active and responsible role varied a great deal. Some students who were not willing or ready to assume the new role were probably so accustomed to teacher-direction that they were overwhelmed when the teacher did not tell them specifically what to do. Furthermore, some of them either doubted their resources – their language proficiency or their self-directedness and learning skills, for instance – so strongly that they were convinced that they could not manage with the course and its requirements. Some students, on the other hand, seemed to reject the active and responsible role because it did not seem to meet their expectations for school work. Generally speaking, however, and in contrast to the findings of Mäntylä's (1996) experiment, the students' English proficiency level did not seem to be a significant factor in their readiness and willingness to assume an active learner role. Gender, on the other hand, may have had some significance (cf. Mäntylä 1996).

In sum, while a clear majority of the students considered the self-direction and student-centredness of the portfolio process to be mostly refreshing and rewarding, although perhaps stressful and demanding at times, some students regarded the process a burden. Hence, the students who were doubtful or distressed might have needed more individualized learner-training as well as reassurance, control and help both at the initial stage of the portfolio programme and later during the course in order to be able and willing to assume an active learner role.

Individual differences were clearly apparent also in the portfolio products. Furthermore, the students' views on the advantages and disadvantages also varied considerably. Many students told that they had learnt learning skills as well as skills related to the planning and organization of their work. They had also learnt to take responsibility for their own work and learning. Thus, the portfolio course clearly seemed to have fostered their learner empowerment. Moreover, akin to the findings of many other foreign or second language portfolio programmes, many students felt that the portfolio course had either improved their language skills or encouraged them to use their English skills more actively. In other words, the portfolio course had fostered these students' lingual empowerment. Nevertheless, while most students believed they had learnt important and also empowering skills, some students doubted whether they had actually learnt anything at all. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, many students who had otherwise been happy with the portfolio approach also felt that they had learnt less than in an ordinary course. Some students also felt that they had not actually learnt *English:* for instance, some of them did not consider improved fluency in reading or writing in English as important a learning outcome as learning new grammar rules or words. Thus, *learning English* and *learning to use English* were not necessarily considered to be the same thing. In this respect, the students' views of language learning and language proficiency slightly differed from those of the Israeli portfolio students (see Smith 1995).

In consequence, the teacher's role was far from easy when trying to balance between the students' different expectations and needs. Flexible and efficient realization of the portfolio innovation necessitated that the teachers were very alert and sensitive to new situations, problems, suggestions and demands, and were ready to adapt and adjust the programme according to emerging needs. Furthermore, the teachers daily confronted new situations that challenged their roles and also their expertise. For instance, giving constructive feedback on an intimate love poem or on the contents of a piece dealing with virtual reality required an approach that was very different from commenting on the grammatical accuracy of the products. Also, the teachers considered the final grading of the portfolios problematic: it was considered difficult to summarize the different criteria, such as content, effort, responsibility and language proficiency, into a single grade and, in some cases, it seemed to be even frustrating. Yet, both the teachers and the great majority of the students seemed to believe that the portfolios gave a more comprehensive view on the students' learning, work, effort and skills and thus were fairer and more many-sided – and also more empowering – as an assessment tool than traditional asssessment methods. In fact, the ownership and pride of their work became more important for some students than the grade. In consequence, our findings concerning the teacher's role as well as portfolios as an assessment tool seemed very similar to the teachers' findings in the experiments in Oulu (see Kauppinen et al. 1994) and in Israel (see Smith 1995).

In brief, the portfolio approach demanded a great deal of work, time and commitment from the teachers and the students and was, by no means, an unproblematic innovation. Yet, despite the problems and the differing opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of the portfolio programme discussed above, the portfolio approach was clearly successful both by opening new opportunities and avenues for the study of English as a foreign language and by fostering students' empowerment. At the very least, the students had *a chance* to try their wings in self-directed and learner-centred study through negotiating their own syllabuses and monitoring and assessing their own learning in English. Thus, they also had a chance to develop their empowerment.

However, the students' portfolio processes as well as their processes of empowerment were highly individual. Therefore, to discern different individual processes, the portfolios required a more thorough analysis than was possible during the actual portfolio course. Accordingly, in the following section, Part III, I shall explain how all portfolios were analysed in order to establish different types. Thereafter, to illustrate some of the portfolio types or profiles, I shall take a closer look at some students and their portfolio processes. Naturally, the main interest in these portfolio portraits focusses on student empowerment.

# Part III

# Portfolio Profiles and Portraits

CHAPTER 1

# Portfolio profiles

## The twofold analysis of the portfolio data

> Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating process. It does not proceed in a linear fashion; it is not neat. (Marshall & Rossman 1989, 112.)

The approximately 100 students and three teachers produced and provided a great amount of data during the portfolio programme. Thus, to make the analysis feasible and also purposeful, the analysis of the data resulting in the following portfolio portraits was twofold. First, a total of 101 portfolio cases were located on a four-field map. The location of each case, namely each student, was mainly based on the analysis of the portfolio, but sometimes additional information from other sources of data was also needed. Then, secondly, with the help of the portfolio case map, some cases were selected for further analysis and portrayal. The students' portfolios provided the primary data for the portrayals, but other sources of data were also used quite extensively. Both of these phases of analysis will be dealt with in more detail in the following account.

Chapter 1

# The analysis of all the portfolio cases

## The four-field map as an instrument of analysis

> The analysis of data can be compared with a map whose purpose is to depict a certain landscape, its routes and viewpoints. (Saarnivaara 1993, 126.)

The purpose of the analysis of all the portfolio cases was to provide a tool for the selection of some cases to be more thoroughly analysed and portrayed. Accordingly, the analysis aimed at discovering and illuminating the variety of different portfolio cases and processes in order to discern the students' different processes of empowerment. Using Saarnivaara's (1993) metaphor quoted above, the processes can be compared with different routes leading to different viewpoints, namely different portfolio cases. Viewing the landscape from these lookout places does not necessarily show every inch of the terrain, but it gives a picture of the most prominent features and sights of that landscape.

The main instrument for the analysis of all the cases was a four-field map consisting of two dimensions. The first dimension (the horizontal axis of the map) was *the students' learner empowerment* in the sense of how actively, responsibly and readily the students took charge of their learning and working processes. In this portfolio programme the students were faced with a situation where their roles as learners as well as their power, control and responsibility for the learning process were changed somewhat dramatically. In other words, when compared to the definition of empowerment of this thesis, the aspect of *giving decision-making power as well as responsibility for their actions* was granted to the students whether they wanted to have it or not. *Resources* were given in the sense that the students were offered information, support and help throughout the course. Thus, the aspect of students *accepting an active role and taking charge of their learning* is of great interest. Therefore, the dimension of learner empowerment focusses on that.

The second dimension (the vertical axis of the map) comprised *the students' affective and volitional experiences of and reactions* to their changed role and situation, in other words, whether the students wanted and liked to be in charge of their own work during the portfolio course. This dimension was chosen firstly because the model for empowerment espoused in this thesis sees willingness to take charge of one's actions as a vital constituent of empowerment and, secondly, because the students themselves often mentioned their feelings, attitudes and experiences as central factors influencing their working processes. Furthermore, students' affective and volitional experiences are vital factors in learning: a learning situation is not only a cognitive performance or accomplishment but also a challenge for the learner's motivation and feelings (see e.g. Järvelä & Niemivirta 1997, 225; see also Csikszentmihalyi 1990):

> Control over consciousness is not simply a cognitive skill. At least as much as intelligence, it requires the commitment of emotions and will. (Csikszentmihalyi 1990, 21.)

In accordance, the map has four areas based on these two dimensions (see Figure 1):

| | |
|---|---|
| positive affective and volitional experiences +<br>- low learner empowerment | + positive affective and volitional experiences<br>high learner empowerment + |
| - low learner empowerment<br>negative affective and volitional experiences - | high learner empowerment +<br>- negative affective and volitional experiences |

*Figure 1.* *The four areas based on the dimensions of learner empowerment and the students' affective and volitional experiences.*

To some extent, the map resembles Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) analysis of experience. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 74), the two most important dimensions of experience are challenges and skills. These dimensions define four areas of experience. Basically, when a person feels that challenges match his or her skills, the situation creates opportunities for an optimal experience, which Csikszentmihalyi calls *flow*. The optimal situation does not, however, necessarily result in flow. Nonetheless, if challenges are perceived as too high for one's skills, the experience may cause anxiety, and if challenges are considered too low for one's skills, the experience may cause boredom. Low skills matched with low challenges may first result in positive experiences, even flow, but later on the situation may cause apathy. (Csikszentmihalyi 1990; see also Strevens 1992, 26–27.)

Although Csikszentmihalyi's (1990, 74) diagram has thus clearly lend some of its features to the analysis chart of the present study, they are not identical. Fundamentally, whilst Csikszentmihalyi's diagram aims at describing the quality of experiences on the basis of the person's perception of the challenges and skills, the present map aims at describing different portfolio cases on the basis of how the student took charge of his or her learning and working process as well as how he or she experienced that process. Consequently, the primary purposes as well as the dimensions of the two charts are different, even though the present study has adopted some of Csikszentmihalyi's terms.

## The analysis of the data

The students' locations on the map were primarily based on the analysis of their portfolios. The portfolios were carefully read and reflected on several times. According to Saarnivaara (1993, 127), the researcher has to be in the heart of the events, which means that the researcher has to know the data thoroughly and in its entirety, to be able to understand the meaning and to "recognize the features of the landscape". Hence, first, all the portfolios were read through to get an overall impression of the students' portfolio processes. Later on, the portfolios were reread, some of them several times, to get to know the data in a thorough and internalized way: "Reading, reading and once more reading through the data forces the researcher to become familiar with those data in intimate ways" (Marshall & Rossman 1989, 114).

Finally, for the purposes of the actual mapping, each portfolio was once again carefully and holistically studied in order to truly comprehend what the student's opinions and experiences of the portfolio programme had been and how the student had taken charge of his or her portfolio process. Furthermore, all other information gathered during the portfolio programme was taken into consideration in the analyses: for instance the two questionnaires, interviews, and the teachers' comments and final assessments as well as my observations during the portfolio course provided valuable additional information (see Figure 2, p. 153). Thus, *triangulation of data* (see e.g. Denzin 1978, Janesick 1994) was applied throughout the analysis. Nevertheless, empowerment being the theme of this thesis, the students' own comments were of greatest importance and, hence, the primary source of data. Then, each portfolio case was given a suggestive position on the map on the basis of the dimensions of learner empowerment and affective and volitional experiences.

| | | **DIMENSIONS** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Students' affective and volitional experiences** | **Learner empowerment** |
| **SOURCES OF DATA** | **primary** | **STUDENTS' PORTFOLIOS**<br>**as sources of their own comments** | **STUDENTS' PORTFOLIOS**<br>**- as sources of their comments**<br>**- as documents of process**<br>**- as produced work** |
| | **secondary** | **Other sources of students' comments (e.g. questionnaires)** | Other sources of students' comments |
| | | (Teacher's and researcher's observations) | **Teacher's comments and assessments**<br>**Researcher's observations** |

*Figure 2. Primary and secondary sources of data.*

Each portfolio case was also summarized and characterized on a sheet of paper as a prompt for memory and also as a means for later analysis and grouping. When more portfolio cases were analysed, they could also be compared and grouped on the basis of their similarities and differences (cf. e.g. Nunan 1992, 148–149). Thus, the groups were not predetermined on the basis of theory but, instead, they emerged from the data.

As described above, each student was located on the map on the basis of a holistic analysis of his or her learner empowerment as well as his or her affective and volitional experiences and reactions. As a guideline for the analysis, these dimensions were translated into some qualitative criteria, such as effort, engagement and attitudes. Since the analysis was holistic, the criteria were not, however, quantified or measured in any way, nor were the portfolios analytically scored in terms of these criteria.

Undoubtedly, it could have been possible to measure or quantify the main features through some measurement devices but in this study that did not seem purposeful. First of all, the students' portfolio processes as well as their processes of learner empowerment were highly individual. Secondly, the features of these processes were not static, although there appeared to be some general tendencies. Thirdly, the features, for instance effort and responsibility or effort and attitudes, were generally intertwined. Fourthly, if the processes had been measured, described and judged on the basis of some quantifiable, preset features, the analysis might not have elucidated the complex nature of some cases. Moreover, to put everybody into the same mould would have been rather disempowering: different students had different language skills, for instance and, thus, taking care and charge of their work during this course placed different demands and challenges on them. Nevertheless, even though the initial purpose was to locate the portfolio cases on the four-field map only in respect to the four categories of high or low learner empowerment and positive or negative experiences, different degrees of all these dimensions became evident in the analysis.

For the location of the students in terms of *the learner empowerment dimension,* the portfolios provided data both in the form of student comments and in the form of produced work and documents of the working process (see Figure 2). In defining whether the student had taken charge of his or her learning and working process, in other words whether his or her learner empowerment was high or low, the main emphasis was on *effort, amount of work, responsibility,* *and engagement*. Some degree of *self-direction* was also considered to be part of learner empowerment. Naturally, *learning and its outcomes* were also regarded as a criterion of whether the student had taken charge of his or her learning and working.

In order to acknowledge the individuality of students' learner empowerment processes, effort, responsibility and other features used as qualitative criteria had to be somehow related to the students' potentials. In other words, when the students' learner empowerment was considered, a decisive factor was whether the students were considered to have attempted to fulfil their potential or not. If the students took challenges that were clearly below their capacities and skills (cf. Csikszentmihalyi 1990), their learner empowerment was not considered high. For instance, a student whose English skills were poor probably had to invest a great deal of effort in order to produce four rather short essays, whereas the production of such essays would most likely have been a simple task for a student with excellent English proficiency. Moreover, the idea of undertaking such an extensive task as the production of a portfolio in English probably caused more distress to students with poor language skills. Therefore, at least initially, taking charge of one's work actively and responsibly may well have demanded more responsibility and persistence from students with weaker language skills. In consequence, the process was mainly related to the student's skills of English: as the working language of the portfolio programme, English played a major role in the working process. Furthermore, there were no data about the students' self-direction and learning skills, for instance.

In most cases, the students' portfolios provided ample data for the analysis. First of all, the students themselves commented on their effort, responsibility, self-direction and involvement in their various assessments. Furthermore, the students' working logs often documented the amount of work and time invested in the portfolio work and the nature of the working process. The portfolio pieces as such also provided evidence of the students' effort and involvement, for instance. However, as mentioned above, the student's effort, responsibility, self-direction and engagement were not quantified; for instance, effort and amount of work were not measured in terms of the hours of work or the number of words produced.

In addition to the data provided by the students' portfolios, other sources of data were also used (see Figure 2, p. 169). The teachers had evaluated the students' portfolio processes and their finished portfolios. These evaluations and my observations during the course offered additional information to either corroborate or challenge the learner empowerment data provided by the portfolio or to provide further insight into the matter. However, in a few cases the students' portfolios provided very little data or very contradictory data on the effort and responsibility or on the working process. In these cases, the teacher's comments were of central importance.

When the students were located on the map on the basis of their affective and volitional experiences of, and reactions towards, the portfolio course and their active learner role, the students' own accounts of their feelings, reactions and experiences provided the primary data (see Figure 2, p. 169). In a few cases, the students did not say anything about their feelings or experiences in their portfolios, for instance whether they liked the portfolio approach or whether they experienced the self-directed work as easy or difficult. Yet, a general attitude of neutral acceptance or slight dislike, for instance, could often be detected. In some cases, the students' interviews, questionnaires or videotaped portfolio celebrations also offered additional information about their experiences. The teacher's observations as well as my observations were also occasionally used to corroborate or challenge the information extracted from the students' own accounts. Nevertheless, there were also two or three cases which did not provide data for any valid interpretations of the students' affective and volitional experiences. These cases were left unclassified.

In sum, the analysis aimed at getting a holistic and thorough impression of the case by taking all existing evidence into account. For instance, if a student claimed that she had not worked well enough, but her working log documented an intensive working process and her pieces of work were very good, she was regarded as a hard worker who was a perfectionist and, thus, her learner empowerment was considered high. The cases did not have to fulfil all the criteria either. For example, a student who was not self-directed or who felt that he or she had not learnt anything could still be categorized as a high learner empowerment case if he or she had taken responsibility for his or her work and had invested a considerable amount of effort into the process.

However, since both the portfolio course and taking charge of one's own learning are processes, neither learner empowerment nor the students' feelings and experiences were static. In other words, many students who clearly liked the portfolio approach or who seemed very learner empowered throughout the course occasionally experienced distress and dislike or were reluctant to work. These fluctuations were considered a natural part of the process and did not seem to affect the students' final comments very much: for instance, some of these students still said in their final assessments that they had really enjoyed the self-directed work and the portfolio course even though they had had occasional problems with their work. Consequently, in the analysis of the students' comments, the main emphasis was on their final reflections. Furthermore, some students had strong initial prejudice towards the approach or had a great deal of problems at the beginning of the course but gradually they overcame their problems and finally even enjoyed the course. Thus, when considering their learner empowerment or affective and volitional experiences, the whole process was taken into account, but the main emphasis was on how they did and felt at the end of the course, having gone through the whole process. In consequence, the students' locations on the map were not based on a single comment or incident but on the general, prevailing impression of the student's learner empowerment and his or her feelings and experiences towards the portfolio approach. (See Appendix 5 for three examples of the analysis.)

## The portfolio cases on the four-field map

The purpose of the mapping of all the portfolio cases was to provide a tool for uncovering and illustrating the range and variety of different portfolio cases and the related processes in order to be able to analyse and illuminate the students' different processes of empowerment. Thus, the analysis did not aim at a classification of the students in clear-cut categories but at the establishment of similarities and differences in the students' working processes. Neither did the analysis aim to present exact percentages of students in each category as a result of the study. The comparison of different schools or teaching groups was not a goal either. Hence, the map is not the final outcome of the analysis, nor is it a significant result of the present study. On the contrary, the map is a mere stepping stone onto further analysis.

The purpose of this approach was to elicit as much and as relevant and pragmatic information as feasible within the practical constraints of the study. First of all, the percentage of the students in each category would tell the situation in that student population only, and would not be generalizable to any other student groups or populations. Secondly, the range and variety of different types is of much greater practical interest than possible percentages. While mere numbers would not offer any help or insight for teachers who might be interested in trying out portfolios in their teaching, information on different types of portfolio processes and cases might help them when they plan their courses and also when they guide their students during the portfolio programme.

Out of the original 108 students who started the course, the portfolios of 101 students were analysed. Thus, there were seven missing cases: two students, a boy and a girl, discontinued their upper secondary school studies altogether and they never submitted their portfolios; three male students handed in their portfolios such a long time after the actual portfolio course that their inclusion in this study was not considered feasible or justified; and, furthermore, there were two students, a boy and a girl, who submitted their portfolios on time and also clearly passed the course but the copies of their portfolios were unfortunately misplaced and lost before the final round of analysis.

On the basis of the holistic analysis described above, approximately 80 students out of the 101 were considered to have high learner empowerment. In other words, although there was a great deal of individual variation with respect to their effort, amount of work, self-direction, responsibility and engagement, these students were considered to have taken charge of their work during the course rather actively and responsibly. Individual variation was also present within the group of 14 students who were regarded to have low learner empowerment.

According to more than 80 students, their experiences of and feelings towards the portfolio course had been somewhat positive. The degree of positive experiences and feelings naturally varied among the group. On the other hand, 13 students had not liked the portfolio approach.

Sometimes, however, the interpretation of student comments was extremely difficult: the comments were very contradictory, or the student did not state his or her feelings and opinions at all. In addition, in one or two cases the portfolio did not provide enough material for any reliable analysis. Therefore, four cases, all male, were not forcefully located in any one of the four areas but were left unclassified in the centre of the map. Figure 3 presents the distribution of the students on the four-field map:

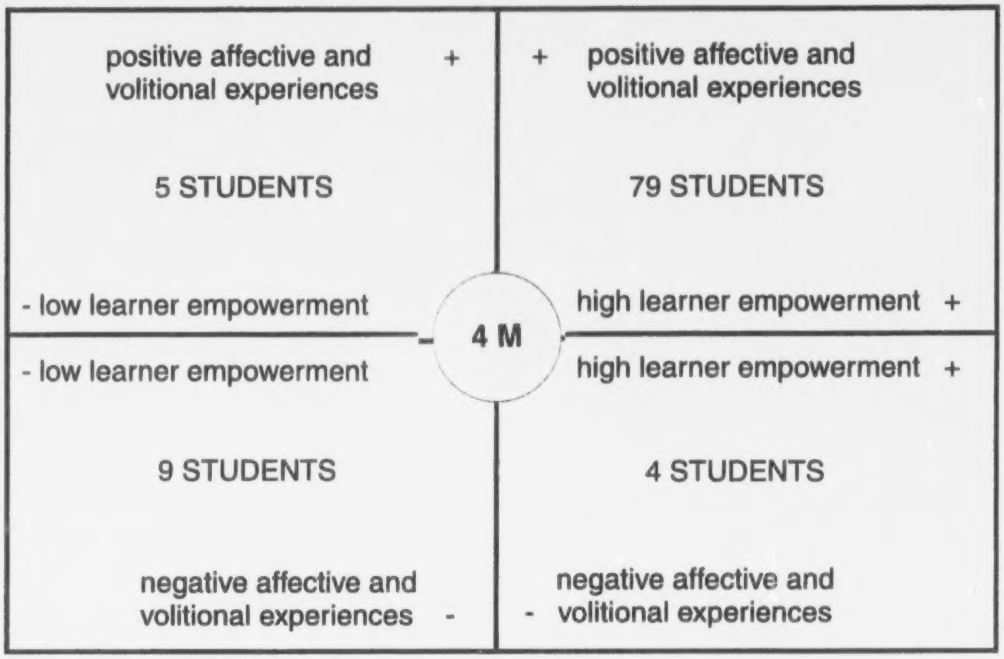
positive affective and volitional experiences +
5 STUDENTS
- low learner empowerment
+ positive affective and volitional experiences
79 STUDENTS
high learner empowerment +
4 M
- low learner empowerment
9 STUDENTS
negative affective and volitional experiences -
high learner empowerment +
4 STUDENTS
- negative affective and volitional experiences

*Figure 3.* *The portfolio students situated on the map on the basis of their learner empowerment and affective and volitional experiences*

As stated above, there was a great deal of individual variation within the four groups. Furthermore, if the map had included neutral zones, particularly that of neutral or unstated experiences and feelings, the distribution of students would have looked slightly different. For instance, there were some 10 to 15 students who were deliberately neutral when commenting on their attitudes and feelings or who listed both positive and negative experiences and feelings quite evenly. If anxiety, dislike or reluctance to work did not characterize their working processes, the affective and volitional experiences were interpreted to be of neutral acceptance. Therefore, if these students' working processes were considered to meet the requirements of high empowerment, these students were placed in the field of high learner empowerment and positive affective and volitional experiences. Thus, these students partly explain the great number of students in this field.

However, although the percentages or the comparisons between different schools and teaching groups were not among the goals of the analysis, the distribution of the students in the four fields proved very interesting. There were significant differences between the two schools and also between the teaching groups, and thus, if the groups had been analysed separately, the maps would have looked very different in each case. For instance, the exclusion of the second Kesy group would have changed the distribution of students on the chart dramatically. In consequence, the number of the students or their percentage in each group or subgroup is not considered a result that could be generalized to any other student populations.

In sum, although the mapping of all portfolio cases was at times difficult and the method and instrument of analysis were open to subjective interpretations, the mapping proved very beneficial in demonstrating and uncovering the whole range and variety of different cases. Furthermore, the analysis made certain groups or types of portfolio cases more apparent and tangible and, thus, individual cases could more easily be analysed and grouped in relation to their similarities or differences. These "profile groupings" thus also provided a basis for selecting an information-rich array of different cases to be portrayed. Hence, a closer look at these profile groups also illuminates the grounds for selecting the different cases to be analysed in the portfolio portraits.

## Portfolio profile groups

The following map shows the suggestive positions of all the portfolio students as groups. As mentioned above, the students are not marked individually: with such a holistic and qualitative method of analysis that was also open to subjective interpretations, it would have been impossible, and most probably also futile for the purposes of the present study, to give each student an exact position or co-ordinates on the map. Instead, the students are clustered into groups. Each group is named, thus attempting to describe the traits that profile that group. In addition, the number of students belonging to each group is given; in some groups, however, the number is given as an approximation, since in some cases it was impossible to draw definite boundaries between the neighbouring subgroups. If all students in a group were either girls or boys, as was the case in some smaller profile groups, it is also stated. The information about their schools or English groups is not given.

Different groupings could have been quite possible in some cases. In consequence, although the location of each group on the map below (see Figure

4) attempts to describe the students' learner empowerment as well as their affective and volitional experiences in the given group, the groups naturally overlap in relation to their learner empowerment and affective and volitional experiences. In short, the location of each group is not absolute but suggestive.

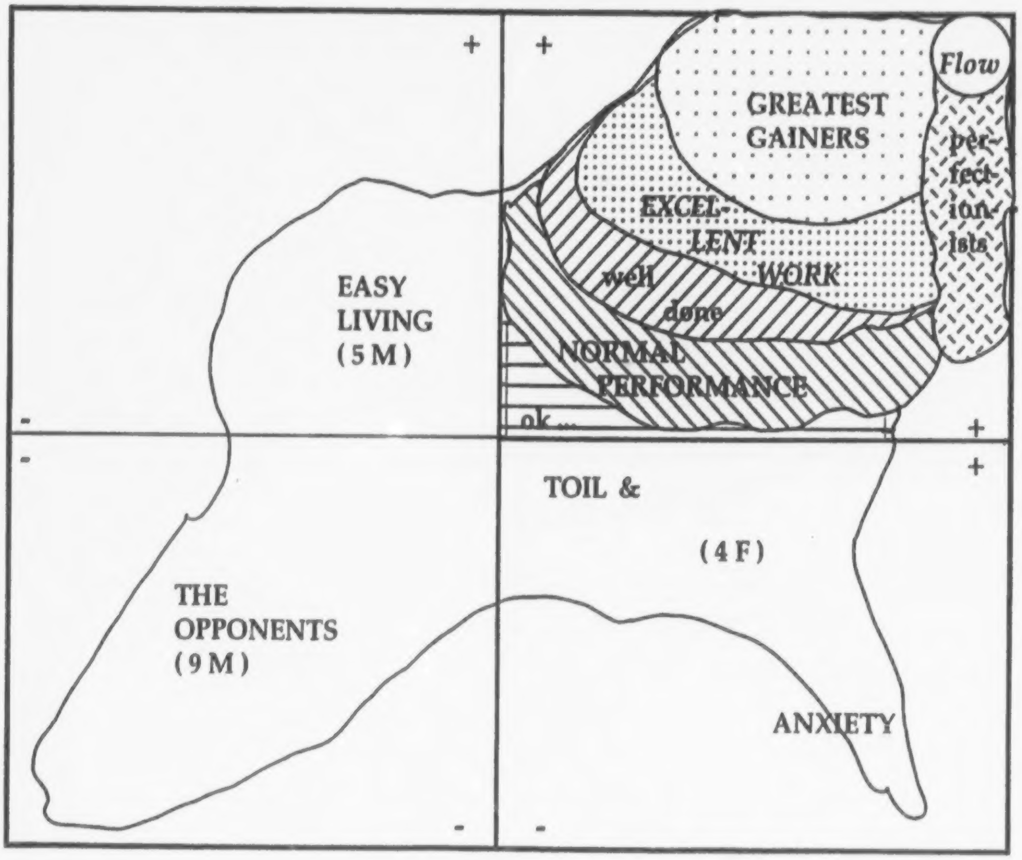
+
+
Flow
GREATEST GAINERS
per-fect-ion-ists
EASY LIVING (5M)
EXCEL-LENT WORK
well done
NORMAL PERFORMANCE
ok...
-
+
-
+
TOIL &
(4F)
THE OPPONENTS (9M)
ANXIETY
-
-

*Figure 4.* *The map of the portfolio profile groups.*

The largest clusters of students situated in the area of high learner empowerment and positive affective and volitional experiences. These altogether nearly 80 students could be divided into a few smaller groups characterized by some profiling trait or traits. First of all, there were circa 25 students who were characterized as *the Greatest Gainers* of this course. A significant trait of this group was a strong element of empowerment: the students took charge of their work actively and responsibly, and their experiences of and feelings towards the portfolio approach were clearly positive. Naturally, many of these students suffered from occasional problems, distress or boredom but, in general, most of them greatly appreciated the freedom to make their own choices, some even seemed to be quite thrilled. Often the reason for their enthusiasm, and also for possible flow, was attributed to the opportunity to set the goals to suit their interests, skills and needs: in addition to their topics, they could choose their challenges in terms of the difficulty of the task, for instance (cf. Csikszentmihalyi 1990). A few students even claimed that during the portfolio course they had experienced pleasure and feelings of achievement in studying English for the first time in a long while. Furthermore, the elements of empowerment also resulted in a significant improvement in their grades: the students' earlier success in English, when measured in their previous grades, ranged from fairly good (8) to poor (5), but in this course they improved their English grades by two or more, for instance from 8 to 10 or from 6 to 9. Thus, the Greatest Gainers were also, at least to some extent, the surprisers of the course. Since the assessment criteria for this course were different, these students could aim at higher grades through effort, work and engagement. Thus, the improvement of the grade did not necessarily indicate a similarly high improvement in their English proficiency. However, very many of these students believed that their English skills had improved and, furthermore, they said that they had gained more confidence and interest in studying and using the English language. In brief, these students can be considered to have gained a great deal through this course: in addition to positive, encouraging and empowering learning experiences, they achieved something very tangible, a significantly better grade, which in a school context is usually highly valued.

There were, nevertheless, two even more exceptional and empowered cases. These two girls would have qualified as the Greatest Gainers, but they were separated into their own subgroup of *Constant Flow,* because their portfolio processes were continuous enthusiasm, empowerment and flow.

A group of eight students seemed to take their learner empowerment to the extreme. These *Perfectionists,* who all were girls, set their goals very high and demanded a great deal from themselves and from their work in terms of both quality and quantity (see Uusikylä 1993, 130). Furthermore, although these students had previously had excellent grades, usually 10 or for some 9, and their work was exquisite, most of them did not consider their work worthy of the best grade. Other students naturally also exhibited features or moments of perfectionism, but their perfectionism was not as dominant or constant as it was in this group. Nevertheless, albeit suffering from occasional feelings of distress, inadequacy and discontentment with their work, the Perfectionists shared a rather positive attitude towards the portfolio approach in all (cf. Uusikylä 1993, 130).

A group of nearly 20 students was named *Excellent Work*. Their learner empowerment was clearly high and the quality of their work was excellent: their portfolios were rewarded with the highest grade. However, as their prior grades had already been very high, 9 or 10, they could not improve their grades as much as the Greatest Gainers. Furthermore, no matter what kind of study or assessment methods had been used, many of these students would probably have succeeded equally well because of their very good English proficiency or because of their diligence and ambition. Thus, as most of these students were already very active and responsible learners, it is difficult to say to what extent the portfolio approach enhanced their learner empowerment. In some cases, however, the portfolio approach seemed to empower students by providing opportunities for personal interests and accomplishments, since the students could choose tasks and goals that were also linguistically interesting and appropriate for their skills and needs. In accordance, the affective and volitional experiences of these students were mostly quite positive. Nevertheless, five or six of these students were somewhat neutral or undecided when commenting on their experiences, feelings and attitudes towards the portfolio approach. Moreover, it seemed that a few students may have put a great deal of effort into their work mainly because of their ambition to obtain a high grade and not necessarily because of their personal interest in the work.

There were also the groups of *Well Dones* and *Normal Performance*. The Well Dones (c. 10 students) performed a little better in this course than in the previous courses. In general, they took charge of their studies actively and responsibly. Some of them liked the portfolio approach very much, others were more neutral in their comments. The approximately ten *Normal Performance* students fulfilled the requirements for passing the course quite well, and in general they maintained their usual standard of work. However, they did not seem overtly active or responsible; nor did they appear to be very enthusiastic, although they seemed to like the portfolio approach in general.

Thus, the portfolio approach did not notably empower them in terms of encouraging them to stretch their habitual performance: their portfolio performances were hence considered to be consistent with their normal performances. Accordingly, they also maintained their grade. Furthermore, there was a group of a few students who liked the portfolio approach, at least to some extent, but who also considered it very demanding at the same time.

In addition, there were three quite exceptional *Creators*. Inspired by the latitude that the portfolio framework allowed, these male students stretched the guidelines and produced very original and different portfolios, which mainly consisted only of pieces of their own creation, for instance poems, short stories and songs. Their learner empowerment was not necessarily considered very high: one of the Creators had perfectionist expectations towards his work, but the other two took the work in a more relaxed way. However, they seemed personally very empowered and inspired by the portfolio course because, as one of them put it, "it gives me the freedom I need to be creative".

These subgroups were not, naturally, totally homogeneous, and there were sometimes considerable differences between the cases in the group: for instance, the degree of positive experiences or the degree of learner empowerment could vary quite extensively. Sometimes a case could have fitted into two groups and, therefore, it proved difficult and at times even arbitrary to draw exact lines between these subgroups.

The remaining three areas of the map were less densely populated and, thus, these groups were not divided into subgroups: Easy Living attracted five male students, the Opponents comprised nine male students, and four female students were situated in the area of Anxiety.

The *Easy Living* students did not invest very much effort in taking charge of their studies. However, they primarily liked the experiment, mainly because it allowed them to take their studies in a rather relaxed and easy way. Yet, two or three of them claimed that the course had been taxing. Their earlier English grades had been good, either 8 or 9.

The nine *Opponents* shared a negative attitude towards the portfolio approach and had a rather low learner empowerment. Their prior English grades varied from poor to very good: in accordance, their English proficiency seemed to vary quite extensively. Most of them regarded teacher-directed teaching as the only proper way to study at school and, thus, did not favour student-directed methods: student-direction was mainly considered to require too much work and effort from students. There were, however, rather substantial differences among these nine students both in respect to their attitudes and experiences and in respect to their efforts.

The four *Anxiety* students did not like the portfolio approach either, mostly because they did not believe that they could produce work in English or that they could take care of their work in a self-directed manner. Still, they took their responsibility for their work seriously, perhaps even too seriously, and toiled and drudged through the course. Two of these students experienced considerable stress and angst throughout the course. The previous English grades of the four Anxiety students ranged from poor (5) to satisfactory (7).

As the students and their portfolio processes and, thus, their possible processes of empowerment were very individual, the groups presented above are not to be considered clear-cut categories or classes but groupings of individual students. Thus, to get deeper into the analysis and into "understanding the meaning", we must look at some individual cases. Allegorically speaking, the map above shows some topographical features marked on the map, but to see what the landscape really looks like, we must go to the different lookout spots which reveal the prominent features of the landscape (cf. Saarnivaara 1993).

CHAPTER 2

# Portfolio portraits

In short, the following portraits attempt to illustrate the variety and range of students' empowerment – both their learner empowerment and lingual empowerment. As the model for empowerment espoused in this thesis regards willingness and volition to take charge of one's actions as a vital constituent of empowerment, the portraits try not only to describe how actively and responsibly the students took charge of their portfolio processes, but also what their affective experiences of and reactions towards their somewhat new role and situation were. Moreover, their lingual empowerment, in other words, their readiness and willingness to use the English language, will be focussed on.

To let the students keep their own voices, the portfolio portraits below will portray real students, not synthesized ideal types. Thus, the cases represent first and foremost themselves even though they also exemplify the characteristics of their groups. Furthermore, although the portraits are samples of the whole, they do not cover all the cases. Nevertheless, through these cases one can see the prominent features of the whole.

The cases were purposefully selected for the portrayal. Patton (1990, 169–183) lists fifteen different strategies for the purposeful selection of information-rich cases, each of the strategies serving a particular evaluation purpose. Once again, my strategy is eclectic. When portraying the unusual and special case of constant flow and that of constant anxiety, the study adopts features of *extreme or deviant case sampling* (see Patton 1990, 169–171). To justify the selection of these rare cases I refer to Stake's (1994, 243) words: "Often it is better to learn a lot from an atypical case than a little from a magnificently typical case". Then again, when selecting an Opponent, a Perfectionist, and also some Greatest Gainers, the present study uses *intensity sampling*, which Patton (1990, 171) characterizes as follows: "Using the logic of intensity sampling, one seeks excellent or rich examples of the phenomenon of interest, but not unusual cases". In general, *maximum variation sampling* shares many features with the strategy of the present study:

> This strategy for purposeful sampling aims at capturing and describing the central themes or principal outcomes that cut across a great deal of participant or program variation. For small samples a great deal of heterogeneity can be a problem because individual cases are so different from each other. The maximum variation strategy turns that apparent weakness into a strength by applying the the following logic: Any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts of a program. (Patton 1990, 171.)

Thus, the eclectic approach adopted for the purposes of the present study is what Patton (1990, 181) calls "a 16th approach – combination or mixed purposeful sampling":

> Thus these approaches are not mutually exclusive. Each approach serves a somewhat different purpose. Because research and evaluations often serve multiple purposes, more than one qualitative sampling strategy may by necessary. - - The underlying principle that is common to all these strategies is selecting information-rich cases. These are the cases from which one can learn a great deal about matters of importance. These are the cases worthy of in-depth study. (Patton 1990, 181.)

Moreover, the search for *negative cases* further justifies the portraits of the Opponent and Misery, the case of the constant anxiety. For instance, if a clear majority of the participants like a programme and find it relevant, particular attention should be paid to those who find it irrelevant or disagreeable because they may provide particularly useful information about a programme, its operation and its effects (Syrjälä & Numminen 1988, 140; Patton 1990, 463–464.) Negative cases also give readers a chance to make their own decisions about the plausibility of the different explanations and thus enhance the credibility of the research (see e.g. Patton 1990, 463–464). In sum, the present study relies on the following motto for the case selection: "Balance and variety are important; opportunity to learn is of primary importance" (Stake 1994, 244).

The approach adopted for the analysis is primarily that of an individual case portrayal with the attempt to describe and illustrate the range and variety of all the participating students and their portfolio processes through these individual cases. Hence, although the portraits do not allow generalizations as representatives of all the approximately one hundred cases, they offer information-rich individual cases that illustrate the range and variety of the total. Furthermore, most of these cases are representatives of some subgroup and as such illuminate the characteristics typical of their group. In sum, the portraits seek to give "information that elucidates programmatic variation and significant common patterns within that variation" (Patton 1990, 172).

The portfolio portraits attempt to answer the following research questions which focus on students' learner empowerment – their taking charge of their work and learning – and its effects both on their learning experiences and on their lingual empowerment:

(1) How did the students' processes of creating their portfolios as well as their actual portfolios differ from each other?
    How did students make their choices; set their goals, define their criteria, choose their topics, etc.?
(2) In students' opinion, did their active role in and control of the learning process have an influence on their learning experiences?
    If yes, how? Why?
(3) Did the students' active role in and control of the learning process as well as their learning experiences influence the students' 'lingual empowerment'?
    Did they influence the students' motivation and self-concept as language learners?
    Did they have an effect on the students' active use of the English language?
    Are students more willing or ready to use English for the tasks and purposes and at the level that they can define themselves?
    Did the students see any changes in their language skills or language proficiency?
        How did the students see their own competence in English?
        How did they define language proficiency in general?

In sum, the portraits attempt to answer whether portfolios could foster students' empowerment in language learning in the context of this portfolio programme. Therefore, the portraits will be presented in the order of learner empowerment, starting with the cases of high learner empowerment which also comprised the majority of all the portfolio students.

## The data and data analysis

The following portraits are mainly based on the students' own comments in their portfolios. Furthermore, most of the portrayed students were also interviewed towards the end of the portfolio programme;[1] in these cases the interviews have also contributed to the portrayal of the student. The videotapings of the portfolio celebrations and the open-ended questions of the questionnaires that the students filled in both at the beginning and at the end of the portfolio course have also been used as additional data in the analysis and description of the cases. The primary sources of these portraits are thus the students' own comments as well as their work and documents of their working process. The teachers' comments and my own observations give additional information and perhaps also offer an additional angle to the student portraits. Thus, *triangulation in the gathering of the data* is salient at every level, as can be seen in Figure 5.

The students' comments, which are of the most important interest, were extracted mainly from their portfolios but also from their interviews, from videotaped portfolio celebrations and from the questionnaires which the students filled in both before and after the portfolio experiment. Within the portfolios, both prologues, epilogues, self-assessments and log entries were used as sources of student comments. The portfolios also provided information as documents of the students' portfolio processes and as products of their work. In addition, some months after the course, in December 1994 or January 1995, the students were asked to write a post-epilogue reflecting on their feelings and experiences of the portfolio course and whether it had had any influence on their English skills or studies. Unfortunately, many students wrote their post-epilogues anonymously and thus the reflections could not be matched with the students. However, some students signed their post-epilogues, and in such cases they were used as data in the portrayal.

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[1] Approximately 20 students, usually five from each teaching group, were selected for the interviews on the basis of the teachers' suggestions: the purpose was to interview students whose portfolio processes had been somehow interesting and different from each other. The interviews took c. 30–60 minutes each and they were semi-structured thematic interviews.

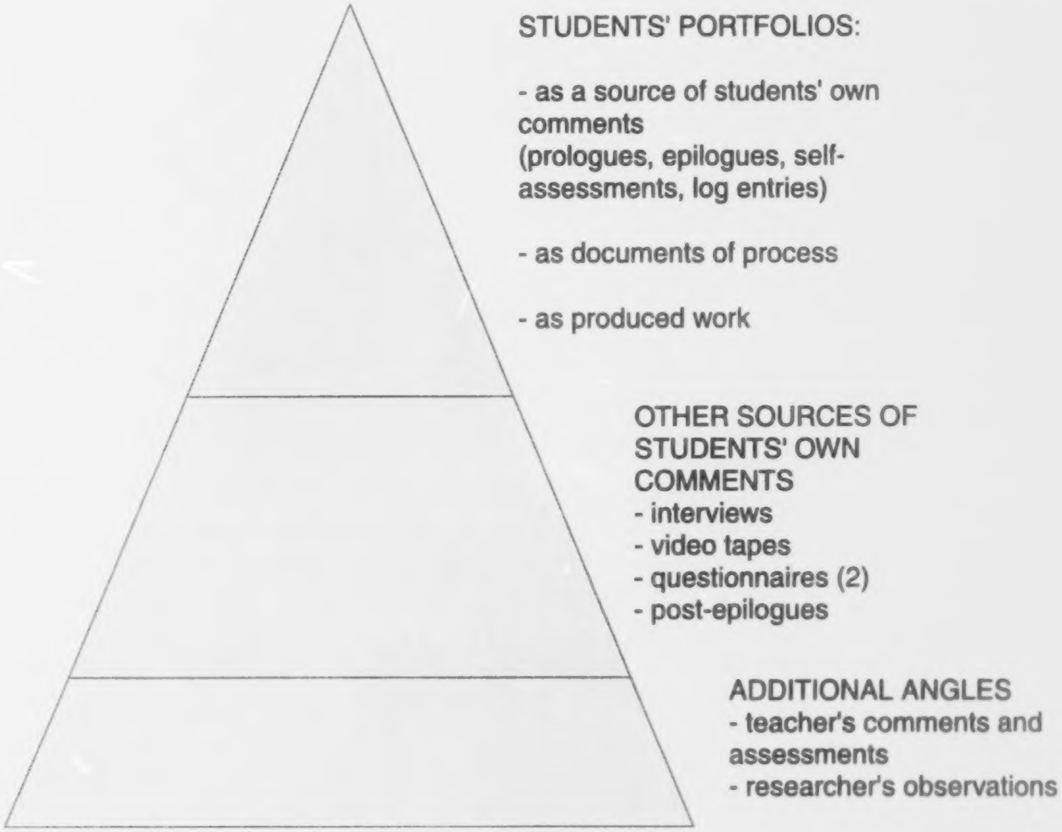

STUDENTS' PORTFOLIOS:
- as a source of students' own comments (prologues, epilogues, self-assessments, log entries)
- as documents of process
- as produced work
OTHER SOURCES OF STUDENTS' OWN COMMENTS
- interviews
- video tapes
- questionnaires (2)
- post-epilogues
ADDITIONAL ANGLES
- teacher's comments and assessments
- researcher's observations

*Figure 5. Triangulation of the sources of data for the portfolio portraits.*

The data were, undoubtedly, very student-centred and student-derived. To bring in some additional angle, and to take the triangulation even further, the teachers' comments were taken into consideration in the portrayal of the individual cases. In addition, my observations during the experiment may very likely have contributed to the portrayal. Thus, the triangulation extended also to *methodological triangulation* as various methods of gathering data were used (see e.g. Denzin 1978, 301–304). Furthermore, the present study has aimed at securing its credibility through partial *investigator triangulation* (see e.g. Denzin 1978, 297). First of all, some of the data were provided by the teachers. Moreover, although the portraits are based on my investigation and interpretation of the data, the teachers have read and accepted the portrayals of their students. Thus, the teachers have evaluated the portraits to be consistent with their views and experiences of these students.

In the portrayals, the sources of direct quotations are given as follows: if the comment was written in the questionnaire, the comment is marked either as (Q1) or (Q2) referring to the questionnaires filled in at the beginning (Q1) or at the end of the portfolio course (Q2). Students' comments expressed in their interviews are transcribed in inverted commas. Post-epilogue comments are marked with (p–e). Comments from their portfolios are written in italics but not marked in any additional way. If the original comment was made in Finnish, the Finnish comment is written first, in italics, and its translation follows in plain format. The translations attempt to imitate the style and tone of the original comment. All original comments, whether in Finnish or in English, are unedited. This, as well as the inclusion of the original Finnish comments and not only their English translations, was considered to be of primary importance: as the purpose of the portfolio programme was to foster students' empowerment, the students must be given a forum to express their thoughts and opinions in an unedited way. In other words, if it is believed that empowerment in education is about validating learners' voices, in this thesis we should listen to their original and individual voices.

## The Greatest Gainers of the portfolio programme

A great number of students did very well in this course: for instance, approximately 30 % of the students improved their English grades by two or more, for instance from 6 to 8 or from 7 to 10. The most extreme improvement was from 4 to 10.

An overwhelming majority of these improvers liked the course. Among these "greatest gainers" of the course, there was, undoubtedly, a great deal of variation both in the portfolio processes and in their outcomes. Somehow, nonetheless, there was always a strong element of empowerment: These students took charge of their studies very actively and responsibly. They assumed both the decision-making power and the responsibility for their work and they took charge to tailor the syllabi to their interests and needs. They set goals for themselves and their work accordingly: for instance, a few students wanted to read a book in English because they had never done it before, and many students wanted to use their own hobbies or interests as a basis for their work. In other words, most of these greatest gainers really seemed to consider the portfolio course an opportunity to learn and work according to their personal learning needs, skills and interests – and to learn for their own good, for their own sake. In consequence, they felt that they had benefited from the course: some even discovered a new interest in either studying or using English, and some also found new areas of culture which they wanted to pursue. Most importantly, most of these students realized that they could use English although their English skills were not perfect. As one of the Greatest Gainers put it herself:

> *Itselleni tämä työ antoi hurjasti itseluottamusta ja tuli sellainen olo, että edes jotain osaa, vaikka numerot ovatkin niin huonoja.*
> For myself this course gave a lot of self confidence and I got a feeling that I can do something even though my grades are so bad.

Because the Greatest Gainers were by far the biggest of the portfolio profile groups and it thus accommodated a great variety of cases, I shall first portray one of them and then present two snapshots in order to illuminate the versatility of the prominent features in this group.

## Why Does My Heart Beat So?

This is a portrait of a student, a girl, whose prior English grades had been 5 and 6. Despite her rather modest success in English, she liked the language and also tried hard to learn it.

At the beginning of the course the student made a careful plan of what to do during the course, but a few days later she decided to take a new approach to her work:

> *Töiden aiheet valitsin mielialan mukaan: Olin tehnyt suunnitelman mitä aion tehdä, mutta kun oli pari päivää mennyt, enkä ollut saanut mitään aikaan, vedin henkselit suunnitelman päälle. Minun ei siis kannattanut koko suunnitelmaa tehdä. Poimin aiheet siitä mitä eteeni sattui, ja minulle se sopi niinkin.*
> I chose the topics according to my mood: I had made a plan of what to do but when a couple of days had passed and I hadn't got anything done, I abandoned the plan. So, there was no use me making any plan. I picked the topics from what I happened to come across with, and that way suited me quite well, too.

The student worked diligently and evenly throughout the course; there were approximately 20 entries in her log, all in English, documenting and describing her working process:

> *1.–3. 5. 1994 Sunday to Tuesday*
> *- Wrote a composition in finnish*
> ** title: Violence on TV*
>
> *5. 5. 1994 Thursday*
> *- Wrote the composition in english*
> *- Red book*
>
> *8. 5. 1994 Sunday*
> *- TV-violence - composition is ready*
>
> *9. 5. 1994 Monday*
> *- Red the whole book of Selected Poems by W. B. Yeats and try to write somekind of review of it*

The student described her portfolio process and products as well as her thoughts and experiences about the portfolio course – and also about her English studies in general – in such a comprehensive and illustrative manner in her prologue that it deserves to be printed here as a whole:

> *My portfolio*
>
> *I love languages, but there are one "but". I am not so good at them. Especially English (which I like the best) goes worse. I do not really understand what is it. I read the words, teach the grammar, but very seldom I succeed. My English number went up in the last course. That made me to try harder in this course.*
>
> *This was the very exiting course. I liked to work with myself, and I am sure that I learnt things better than ever. For example, when I wrote those four works I made the same mistake in all those. It must be somewhere in my brain now that how it is right.*

*I wanted to do something special, something, what nobody else will do. I red the poem book, and I was right: Nobody else did not red the samekind of book. I went to the library and found an interesting poem book – in English. I usually read poems, and I thought, it would be nice to read one book in English. It was nice and I know it leave not my last English poem book.*

*Next I started to think what could be my second work. My head was very empty then, and I have to recourse to ready material. I wrote the usual composition. I did not like that work very much because it was too usual!! I thought: this is special course, I must do something special too! By the way the composition left one of my works.*

*I felt, my head became more and more emptier: no imaginations. So I had to take the second usual work. I was not exiting at all of it. (I think that is my worst work) When I wrote that work, I got an inspiration: Next work had to be my best and loveliest work. It was a person commentary. I loved to done it, and I hope you will see it when you read it. Elvis is one of my favourites.*

*I am very proud of myself that they are done just now. Aim of mine was that the works had to be ready before the "test-week". I made it.*

*I hope that my works are good enough. To me they are my best. I know, I could not done anything better in this time. My opinion is, I was diligent enough, and now I only hope the results.*

*The course was fine, and it was very fine to me!*

## The selected pieces

The student's first selected piece of work was a review of *The Selected Poems* by William Butler Yeats. Both the piece itself and its self-assessment communicated a genuine interest in poetry; the realization that she could enjoy poetry also in English was a new, empowering experience for her:

> *I red the book as it had been a usual, but the book was not usual to me. It was a poem-book, and what the best, in English. I usually read very much poem-books, but this was my very first in English. - - There were a few poems which I did not understand because of the language, but usually I understand the poems surpraising good. - -*
>
> *I loved to read Yeats's poems, even if they were so sad and gloomy. There was a one poem which I like the best. I would like to write it here;*
>
> *WHY DOES MY HEART BEAT SO ?*
> *Why does my heart beat so?*
> *Did not a shadow pass?*
> *It passed by a moment ago.*
> *Who can have trod in the grass?*

> *What rogue is night-wandering?*
> *Have not old writers said*
> *That dizzy dreams can spring*
> *From the dry bones of the dead?*
> *And many a night it seems*
> *That all the valley fills*
> *With those fantastic dreams.*
> *They overflow the hills,*
> *So passionate is a shade,*
> *Like wine that fills to the top*
> *A grey-green cup of jade,*
> *Or maybe an agate cup.*

The piece of work that she considered her best one was about Elvis Presley. Her self-assessment of the piece describes a working process full of flow:

> *This personal commentary was my last and the best work. I loved to do it. - - I red encyclopedias and some articals about him. There were a lot of things of him in my head.*
>
> *This work took my time very much. Any other work, I did not not so long, but I loved to do it so. I want to do it!*

## Empowerment

As the student said herself in her prologue, the portfolio approach really seemed to suit her. The student clearly invested a great deal of effort into her work: producing the required work the easiest way did not satisfy her, she wanted to do something special:

> *I thought: this is special course, I must do something special too!*

Although the working process was not constant flow – the production of her second and third pieces did not appear to inspire her very much – she was happy, even surprisingly happy, to work according to her own interests at her own pace:

> *Pidin todella kurssista. Oli mukava opiskella kieltä jotenkin muuten, kuin kaavamaisesti oppikirjasta. - -*
>
> *Olin yllättynyt, miten ahkera olin, kun rupesin toimimaan! Ylitin aivan itseni. Innostuin uudesta työtavasta ja aiheista enemmän kuin odotin. Alussa kieltämättä tuli tunne, että selviänköhän*

> *ikinä, mutta nyt olen jo plussan puolella. (Toivottavasti olen tehnyt työt niinkuin oli tarkoitus!)*
> I really liked the course. It was nice to study the language in some different way than from the book in a routine way. - -
> I was surprised how diligent I was when I started working. I quite surpassed myself. I became more interested and enthusiastic about the new working method and the topics than I had expected. At the beginning I actually had my doubts of making this course but now I'm on the winning side. (I hope I have done the work as it was supposed to!)

In terms of empowerment in language learning, the student had been quite determined and empowered also before the portfolio experiment. However, her prior success in English had been rather modest but she still liked the language and was also willing to work hard to learn it:

> *I love languages, but there are one "but". I am not so good at them. Especially English (which I like the best) goes worse. I do not really understand what is it. I read the words, teach the grammar, but very seldom I succeed. My English number went up in the last course. That made me to try harder in this course.*

At the end of the portfolio course she was convinced that she had learnt in a more efficient way when producing her portfolio:

> *I liked to work with myself, and I am sure that I learnt things better than ever. For example, when I wrote those four works I made the same mistake in all those. It must be somewhere in my brain now that how it is right.*

Although considering some of her English mistakes stupid and sometimes also worrying whether the mistakes might interfere with understanding what she had wanted to say, the student was not defeated by her mistakes. On the contrary, she regarded the mistakes as opportunities for learning. An important factor in her learning process was her teacher's feedback and support:

> *Opettaja tarkasti työni ja huomasin miten tyhmiä virheitä olin tehnyt. No, minä olen sen itsestäni oppinut, että opin virheiden kautta asioita paljonkin! Opettaja oli suurena apuna töitten teossa. Suuri Kiitos hänelle siitä!!!*
> The teacher checked my pieces and I noticed how stupid mistakes I had made. Well, one thing I have learnt about myself is that I can learn a lot through my mistakes! The teacher was a big help for me in producing the pieces. Big Thanks to her for that!!!

In addition to finding an inspiring and suitable method to study, the student discovered a new opportunity to use and enjoy English in a personally relevant way through reading English poetry:

> *I usually read poems, and I thought, it would be nice to read one book in English. It was nice and I know it leave not my last English poem book.*

In consequence, the student seemed to gain confidence in her use of English. Furthermore, she set new goals for her further language studies and had a positive attitude towards reaching them. However, she did not expect to attain her goals for nothing, but through hard and diligent work:

> *Jotenkin tämän kurssin aikana aloin kiinnostua ja pitää englannista vieläkin enemmän: Luen enemmän englanniksi lehtiä, kuuntelen TV:n englantia jne. Jos vain mahdollista, lähden lukion jälkeen ulkomaille kieltä oppimaan, jos oppisin siellä painamaan päähäni englantia paremmin, kuin täällä.*
>
> *Englannin kieli on kivaa ja haluan oppia sitä paljon paremmin, kuin osaan sitä nyt! Täytyy panostaa koko kesä ensi vuotta varten ja opetella kaikki kielioppi mitä tähän asti ollaan käyty, aivan alaluokilta saakka. Välillä kun tuntuu, että perusasioitakin meinaa unohtua. Kielioppi on nimittäin A ja O jos haluan saada itseni kirjallisesti ymmärretyksi. Toisinaan tuntuu, ettei sekään onnistu! Puhuessani minua on aina ymmärretty, ja uskon, että kun tarpeeksi yritän saavutan sen tason myös kirjoittaen!*
>
> Somehow during this course I started to like and be interested in English even more than before: I read more magazines in English, listen to English on TV etc. If only possible, I'll go abroad to learn the language after school, if I should learn English there better than here.
>
> English is fun and I want to learn it much better than what I know now! Next summer I'll have to work hard for next year and revise all the grammar we have had so far, from primary school onwards. Sometimes I feel that even basic things seem to be forgotten. Grammar is important if you want to be understood in writing. Sometimes I feel that I can't manage even that! I've always been understood when I speak and I believe that I'll reach that level also in writing if I only try hard enough!

The student ended her epilogue with a quotation that seems to summarize her attitude, and her empowerment, very accurately:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Älä tule kertomaan* | Don't come and tell me |
| *miten paljon olet tehnyt työtä,* | how much you have worked, |
| *tule näyttämään,* | come and show me |
| *mitä olet saanut aikaan!* | what you have achieved! |

Later on, when writing her post-epilogue in December, the student seemed both very happy with and also empowered by the portfolio course. She was still clearly proud of her work:

> *Selasin jälleen kerran, tämän tehtäväni saatuani, portfolioni, joka on vieläkin hyvässä tallessa. Tuskin koskaan sitä tahallani tulen hävittämään. Ei todella ollut ensimmäinen kerta kun lueskelen töitäni. Aina, kun kansio tulee eteeni laatikon sopukoista, tunnen tavallaan ylpeyttä ja iloisuutta mielessäni. (p–e)*
> When I got this writing assignment, I once more leafed through my portfolio which I still keep in a safe place. I'll probably never lose it on purpose. It really wasn't the first time that I read through my pieces of work. Everytime the portfolio pops out from the inside of my drawer, I feel kind of pride and joy in my mind. (p–e)

She also felt that she had learnt a great deal: in her opinion, her writing skills, in particular, had improved considerably. However, the most important and empowering thing for her was to notice that she could learn and use English:

> *Portfolio kannusti todella oppimaan. Huomasin, etten olekaan niin "looseri" kuin olin luullut. Kirjoittaessani juttuja, huomasin, että sanavarastossani oli paljon sellaisiakin sanoja, joita en tiennyt siellä olevan! Tai sitten niitä en ollut muulloin tarvinnut. Onneksi kuitenkin joskus näinkin päin. Yleensä kun saa sanakirjan kanssa painia aivan tavallistenkin sanojen kanssa! Täytyy myöntää, että ennen portfoliota englanti motivoinut minua lainkaan, luulisin, että suhteellisen huonon menestyksen takia. Oli ihana huomata, että saan tuloksiakin, mutta töitä siihen vaaditaan paljon, ainakin minulta. (p–e)*
> The portfolio really encouraged me to learn. I noticed that I wasn't such a loser as I had thought. When writing those tasks I noticed that there were many such words in my vocabulary that I didn't know had been there! Or then, perhaps, I hadn't needed them. Fortunately, for once it went this way. Usually I have to check even quite ordinary words in the dictionary! I must admit that before the portfolio English didn't motivate me at all, probably because of my poor success in it. It was wonderful to see that I can get results but it takes a lot of work, at least from me. (p–e)

## Two snapshots of the Greatest Gainers

### *Reading "Being happy"*

A student who also deserves a closer look is a boy whose portfolio process was distinguished by empowerment through persistance and effort. Previously, his English grade had been 6.

For him, the greatest achievement in the course was to read a book in English – his first ever. He had decided to read a book; unfortunately, the only English book that he had at home was not very interesting and reading it proved both difficult and tedious. Yet, he did not give up and little by little reading became easier. He managed to read the book from cover to cover. This achievement gave him more confidence, and the idea of reading another book in English some time in the future did not seem such an impossible task any more.

In addition to the reading of the book, an empowering experience in the portfolio process was his peers' help: they read through his texts, gave him feedback and also helped with his mistakes. He felt that with their assistance he could learn a great deal since it was easier for him to ask his friends for advice than to ask the teacher in front of the whole class.

His prologue reads as follows:

> *I have read English now about 9 years, but still I'm unsure of oneself. Something I can write and speak, but not enough. it will take a lot of time.*
>
> *Now I have done 4 works for my English portfolio. The first work was criticism for Pantera's newest album "Far beyond driven". I think it's not so bad. I was surprised, because it was my first portfolio works, that I can write text of that kind. I started write this text, because the album was my newest and I still criticised it in my mind.*
>
> *The second work was reading the book "being happy". I start read it, because I want to read book in English and we don't have any other book. This work is important for me, because it was my first book, which I have read in English and it takes so much time to clear it up.*
>
> *The third work was text "Virtual reality". I have to say that it is my best work. It's different from any other of my works, because I recorded it to the tape, by computer reading. It is my main work. I chose this work, because I think this text would be intresting.*
>
> *The fourth work was criticism of musical named MISI. This work was only "work for my English portfolio", nothing more.*
>
> *The most important work in my portfolio is work "Virtual reality", which I mentioned before. The book reading is the hardest work in this portfolio.*

### *In my opinion*

Another snapshot pictures a student who appeared very learner empowered. He seemed to have very clear and well-reasoned ideas of what to do:

*When I had to decide what was the first work, choice was easy to do. I knew once that I would do something which is something about James Bond. How to carry out it was problem. First I thought that portrait would be nice but finally I decided that summary would be the best choice and a portrait perhaps later.*

His second piece had also solid grounds for its production:

*I thought that meaning of portfolio is use own brains also not only books. So I decided to do personal commentary. Theme was not clear.*

In addition to expressing his opinions and assessing his pieces in an empowered manner, he was very articulate in analysing the whole portfolio process. In his opinion, the portfolio course was a chance to learn for oneself, to use one's own ideas and to take the responsibility for one's actions. Whether one learnt anything or not was up to one's own actions. He also gave suggestions for later portfolio courses. The teachers got some advice as well.

*So work was interesthing to do because I myself was interesthing about theme and it is one of most important thing when you do for example portfolio.*

*Portfolio-projekti oli varsin antoisa. Itse joutui/sai ottaa vastuun siitä mitä tekee. Tämä palveli varmasti työelämässä eteen tulevia tehtäviä. Myös poikkeavuus normaalista kirjan pänttäämisestä jäi positiivisena kokemuksena mieleen. Itse kielen oppiminen mahdollisesti jäi joiltain osin vähiin. Oli omasta viitseliäisyydestä kiinni jäikö kurssista päähän mitään uutta. Omalta kohdalta voin sanoa että ainakin sanavarasto ja englannin kirjoittaminen harjaantui kurssin aikana, mutta ehkä puhuminen ja kuuntelu jäivät vähemmälle ja tulevaisuudessa kannattaakin sijoitaa puhdasta kuuntelu harjoitusta kurssiin, vaikka se oppilaista tuntuisikin raskaalta raskaalta töiden ohessa.*
The portfolio project was quite rewarding. You had to/were allowed to take responsibility for what you do. This most certainly benefited the situations we come up with in working life. Also, this course was so different from the usual studying the book and that was a positive experience. In some parts, actual learning English may have been a bit weak. It really depended on yourself if you learnt anything new or not. For my part, I can say that at least my vocabulary and writing in English have improved during the course. Perhaps speaking and listening got a little less attention and in the future you should have pure listening exercises in this course although students might consider it hard in addition to these pieces of work.

*Myös opettajien turha tärkeys pois oppimisenhan pitäisi olla hauskaa.*
Teachers shouldn't be too important or stuffy either, learning should be fun.

## Absolutely fabulous – a case of constant flow

> *Mahtava! Juuri sopiva kurssimuoto minulle. Sain itse muodostaa aikatauluni, valita aiheeni. Paras kurssi englannissa tähän mennessä!! (Q2)*
> Fabulous! Just a perfect course for me. I could design my timetable myself, choose my topics. The best course in English so far!! (Q2)

There were several students who experienced moments of flow, feelings of total absorption and involvement in their work (see Csikszentmihalyi 1990), during their portfolio processes. This student, however, is one of the two exceptional cases whose working processes appeared to be constant flow from start to finish. Previously, her English grade had been 8.

### The process and the products

*Prologue*
*The harbour of life – my own poem/song (and its self-assessment)*
*Isadora Duncan, a real character – a portrait (and its self-assessment)*
*Emily Dickinson – a portrait (and its self-assessment)*
*I'll dance away – an essay*
Epilogue
Logbook

> *All this time, during this course, I was very in this portfolio-working. The theme, the arts, was the best possible for me. I was full of different kinds of ideas, so it was easy for me to start working.*

The student's whole working process seemed smooth and absorbing: she was very keen to start working and went to the library to gather information about possible topics the very day her class was told about the portfolio course. She had several ideas and she started processing those about which she could find enough information. She proceeded systematically: she made a plan for her portfolio and allotted some time for portfolio work after most school days before being engaged in her hobbies. Nevertheless, she also worked when she got inspiration. She processed several pieces simultaneously and did not suffer from hurry or stress of finishing her portfolio on time at any point during the course. The following extract from her prologue sums up both her portfolio process and products:

> *First I started to do the portrait of Emily Dickinson. I read her poems and searched information about her. Although it took a lot of time to do this portrait, I think that it was very interesting and meaningfull.*
>
> *After getting the first version of the portrait of Dickinson ready, I started to search information Isadora Duncan. It was quite easy to make the portrait of her, because there were lots of books, which tell about her, in library. I think that Duncan is very interesting person to become familiar with. She has had so unusual life.*
>
> *The third part of my workfile is the poem / the song which I wrote myself. As a starting point I had a postcard, which has Albert Edefelt's painting on it.*
>
> *At last I wrote an essay about my own hobby, dancing. It came quite easily, because I didn't have to search any information.*

According to the student's log, in addition to compulsory class conferences and other lessons, she had used about 40 hours for the portfolio. Nevertheless, she considered the time well spent, interesting and even relaxing; she could not find anything negative to say either about the portfolio approach or the working process in her interview:

> *"Työt on tullut niin itsestään, ja on pitänyt karsiakin niitä: ois ollu paljon muitakin joita olisi ollut kiva tehdä. Niitä on ollut niin kiva tehdä!"*
> "The pieces were sort of born by themselves, and I had to leave some out as well: there were so many more ideas that would have been nice to realise, too. It has just been so nice to do them!"

In addition to conveying meaning through English, the student wanted to communicate visually and, therefore, she also invested a lot of time in the visual design of her work. All her pieces were handwritten in different printing styles which illustrated either the era or the personality of the topic, or of the student herself. For example, the portrait of Emily Dickinson was a booklet written and ornamented in the 19th century style on watercoloured paper, and the poem/song *the Harbour of Life* was painted to look like an old message in a bottle recovered from sea (see Figure 6, p. 203).

> *For me mean the appearances of my works a lot. It's important for me, that they look carefully-finished. I have tried to get something from my own personality in those works. Perhaps I waste a lot of time, when I did them, but the main thing is that I'm contented with them.*

## Selection and self-assessment

The student considered all her pieces good and important for herself and, thus, leaving two out of four pieces proved somewhat difficult. Finally, she chose three for the final assessment: the portraits of Emily Dickinson and Isadora Duncan and the poem/song. The student introduced and assessed the pieces separately describing also the working process in detail. Feelings of flow – "optimal experiences of learning", moments of total involvement as well as of accomplishment and learning (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) – often come out in her self-assessments:

> *Lopullisen version valmistaminen vei minulta paljon aikaa, mutta pidin siitä. Koin tämän työn tekemisen hyvin mielenkiintoisena. Tuntui, kuin olisin hypännyt edelliselle vuosisadalle, lukiessani vanhoja runoja. Tekstiä kirjoittaessani jouduin etsimään lähteitä, kokoamaan tietoa, kääntämään ja muotoilemaan lauseita.*
>
> *Tästä harjoituksesta on varmasti hyötyä jatkossakin!*
>
> Making the final version took a lot of time but I enjoyed it. I experienced doing this work as very interesting.When I was reading old poems I felt as if I had leaped back to the previous century. When I was writing the text I had to search for sources, gather information, translate and form sentences.
>
> I'm sure this exercise will prove beneficial later on as well!

> *Kun kirjoitin runoa, oli yö ja ulkona oli pimeää. Minua väsytti, mutta en olisi voinut kuvitellakaan saavani unta ennenkuin runo olisi valmis. Sitä kirjoittaessani koin eräänlaisia ahaa-elämyksi; yht'äkkiä vain tiesin, mitä seuraavaksi tulisi. Tarina syntyi kuin itsestään. En repinyt hiuksia päästäni sen vuoksi. Käytin paljon apunani sanakirjaa löytääkseni mahdollisimman kuvaavia ilmauksia. Ja sitten se lopulta oli valmis.*
>
> *Myöhemmin lukiessani runoa ja tarkastellessani riimejä, alkoi mieleeni muodostua selvä rytmi ja sävel. Lauleskelin yksinollessani sitä ja niin se sitten syntyi: pieni laulunpätkä, joka on lähtöisin runosta, joka on lähtöisin mielikuvista, jotka ovat lähtöisin Edefeltin maalauksesta!*
>
> When I was writing this poem, it was night and it was dark outside. I was tired but I couldn't even have imagined of getting sleep before the poem was ready. When I was writing it I experienced sort of revelations; suddenly I just knew what would come next. The story just came out like by itself. I didn't tear my hair out because of it. I used a dictionary a lot to help me to find as descriptive expressions as possible. And so it was finally finished.
>
> Later on when I was reading the poem and pondering on its rhymes a clear rhythm and melody began to form in my head. I sang it to myself and so it was born: a little song that springs from a poem that springs from thoughts and images springing from a painting by Edefelt!

## Empowerment

As seen above, the student enjoyed her portfolio process whole-heartedly. Also, in terms of learner empowerment, she seemed perfectly empowered in taking an active and responsible role in her learning in order to fulfil her potentials:

> *Koin tämän portfoliokurssin oikein sopivaksi opiskelumuodoksi minulle. Se antoi mahdollisuuden itsenäiseen työskentelyyn sekä vapaavalintaisiin työskentely-tapoihin. Sain itse suorittaa ajanjakoni, ottaen huomioon töiden vaatiman aikamäärän. Aiheet oli vapaasti valittavissa, joten ne olivat semmoisia, jotka kiinnostivat juuri minua. - -*
>
> *Olen kaikin puolin tyytyväinen kurssisuoritukseeni.*
>
> I experienced this portfolio course a very suitable working method for me. It gave me the opportunity for self-directed work and for working methods of my own choice. I could also allot my time myself, considering how much time each work would need. I could choose my topics, so they were topics that really interested me personally. - -
>
> I'm satisfied with my achievements in this course in every respect.

> *Tein mielestäni ahkerasti töitä. Panostin todella paljon tähän kurssiin. Käytin hyväkseni harrastuksiani. Mielestäni lopulliset työni ovat hyvin onnistuneita. Olen tyytyväinen itseeni. (Q2)*
>
> In my opinion I worked diligently. I really put a lot of effort into this course. I made good use of my hobbies. I think my final pieces are really good. I'm satisfied with myself. (Q2)

The student herself considered the learner-centredness and self-direction as well as the freedom and responsibility of the portfolio approach the reasons for her effort and enthusiasm; otherwise, she did not regard herself as a particularly keen or diligent student:

> *Portfoliotyöskentely oli mielestäni ehdottomasti kannattava kurssimuoto. Koin sen tyyppisen opiskelun itselleni sopivaksi; Paitsi että saan itse ideoida ja käyttää mielikuvitustani, se pakottaa minunlaiseni oppilaan, joka helposti vajoaa jonkinlaiseen apatiaan tunneilla, tekemään tosissaan töitä. (p-e)*
>
> In my opinion, the portfolio approach was absolutely beneficial as a course method. I experienced that kind of studying suitable for myself; in addition to letting me realize my own ideas and use my imagination, it forces a student like me, who easily falls into some kind of apathy in lessons, to really work. (p–e)

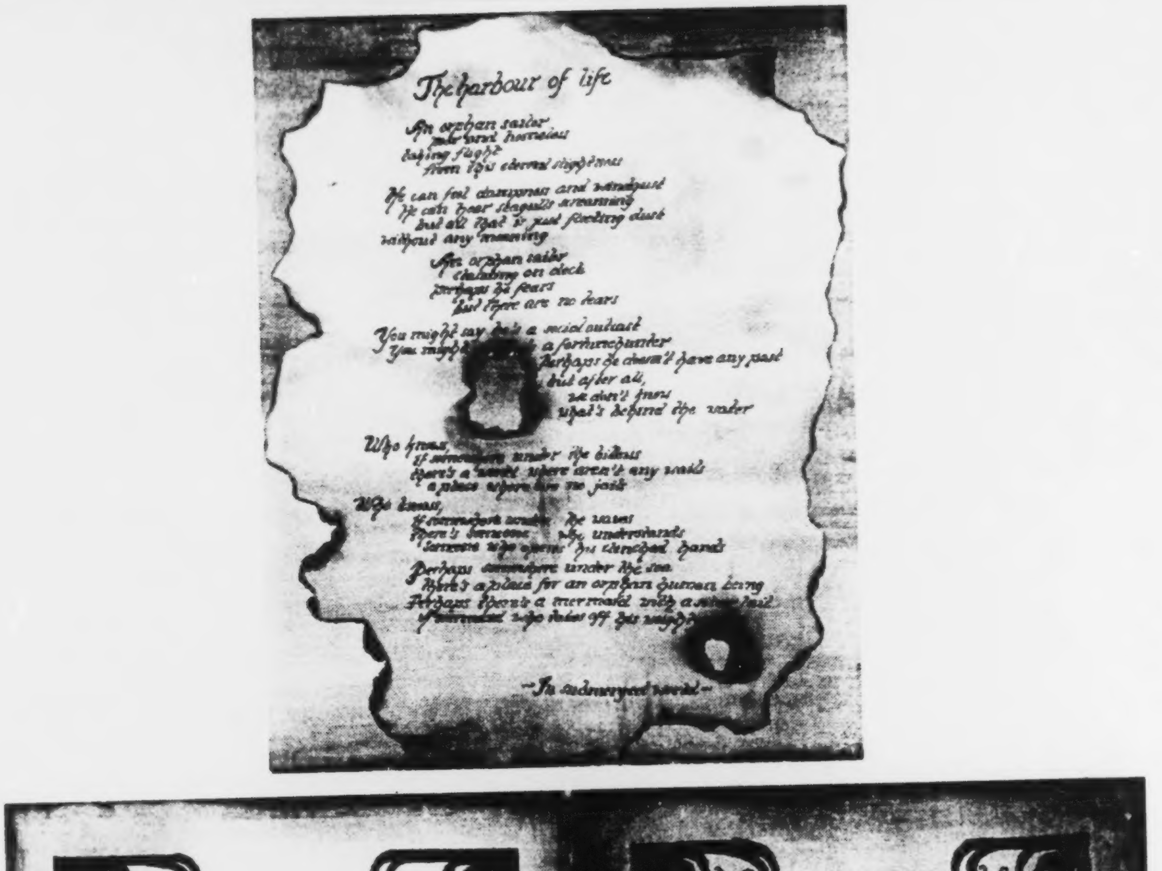
Furthermore, when assessing both her language learning and learning in general, the student seemed very satisfied:

> *Luulen, että tästä kurssista on ollut minulle erityisen paljon hyötyä. Olen joutunut/saanut käyttää englannintaitojani käytännössä, kääntäessäni, kootessani, etsiessäni erilaisia tietoja. Olen itse ollut vastuussa töistäni ja niiden valmistumisesta.*
>
> *Kaikenkaikkiaan olen sitä mieltä, että lukio-opiskeluun tulisi yleisesti sisällyttää vastaavanlaisia kursseja, joissa oppilas itse joutuu käyttämään taitojaan/tietojaan käytännössä.*
>
> I think that this course has been particularly beneficial for me. I have had to use / I have had a chance to use my English skills in practice, in translating, collecting and looking for different kinds of information. I have been responsible for my work and for getting it done myself.
>
> All in all, I think that senior secondary school studies should include courses like this where students themselves have to use their knowledge and skills in practice.

In terms of language learning, the student said in her interview that ordinary courses had given a good grammatical basis for the language but that courses like this were needed to give the learners a chance to use language skills in practice. In her opinion, she had learnt, for instance, to produce text more easily and to seek, gather and use information in English. Furthermore, she had increased her vocabulary and learnt to use dictionaries more readily.

The student seemed to view language as a vehicle for communication rather than a form. For example, she did not comment on the language of her own work as such but, instead, she commented on the feelings of both receiving and producing meaning and expressing herself in English: for instance, reading old English poetry and writing a poem in English were new experiences for her. For her, they – as the whole portfolio process – were experiences of personal relevance, flow and empowerment.

> *monday 18th        time 19.00–22.00*
>
> *- - I just finished this poem, which name is "The Harbour of Life". I can't describe in words what kind of feelings I had when I wrote it. I think that I never have succeeded better in writing my thoughts to words, to poem. Perhaps for everybody else this poem sounds strange, but for me it means a lot!*



The harbour of life

An orphan sailor
who went homeless
taking flight
from this eternal nightmare

He can feel dampness and windgust
He can hear seagulls screaming
but all that is just flocking dust
without any meaning

An orphan sailor
standing on deck
Perhaps he fears
but there are no tears

You might say he's a social outcast
You might [illegible] a fortunehunter
Perhaps he doesn't have any past
but after all,
we don't know
what's behind the water

Who knows,
if somewhere under the billows
there's a world where aren't any walls
a place where are no jails

Who knows,
if somewhere under the waves
there's someone who understands
someone who opens his clenched hands

Perhaps somewhere under the sea
there's a place for an orphan human being
Perhaps there's a mermaid with a silver tail
a mermaid who takes off his [illegible]

—In underwater world—

I know That He Exists

I know that he exists
Somewhere, in silence.
He has hid his rare life
From our gross eyes

'Tis an instant's play,
'Tis a fond ambush,
Just to make bliss
Earn her own surprise!

But should the play
Prove piercing earnest,
Should the glee glaze
In death's stiff stare,

Would not the fun
Look too expensive?
Would not the jest
Have crawled too far?

Emily Dickinson became paralysed in 1884 and she died in 15 May 1886. After her death her Sister, Lavinia, found over a thousand poems in her room. The poems were written in homemade booklets. Almost all of them were short lyrics, most were untitled and undated.

The first volumes of Dickinson's poetry to be published were edited by Higginson and Mabel L. Todd in 1890 and 1891. Other volumes were edited by Dickinson's niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi and Alfred Leete Hampson, and they were published in 1914, 1924, 1929, 1930, 1935 and 1937. In 1955 Thomas H. Johnson prepared a three volume variorum edition, 'The poems of Emily Dickinson'.

Figure 6. *The Harbour of Life and the portrait of Emily Dickinson.*

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## Great expectations – a case of a perfectionist

Eight students, all girls, could be labelled as perfectionists (cf. Uusikylä 1993, 130). They set their expectations for the quality and often also for the quantity of their work extremely high. For instance, one student was afraid that two short stories – instead of the planned three stories and perhaps some poems – would not be sufficient as one piece of work, and another student kept polishing her writing in the pursuit of "a perfect story every time". The high expectations took their toll:

> *Ja koska haluaisin aina kirjoittaa mahdollisimman hyviä, persoonallisia ja mielenkiintoisia juttuja, voin todellakin puhua luomisen tuskasta.*
> And because I would always like to write as good, personal and interesting stories as possible, I can really talk about the pain of creating.

These students' attitudes towards their own work were somewhat ambivalent: they were proud of their work but, yet, not necessarily quite satisfied with its standard. In accordance, most of them readily admitted their perfectionism:

> *When it comes to my works I'm a kind of a person who thinks nothing can ever be perfect.*

The following case portrays one of these students. Previously, her English grade had been 10.

### The process and the products

*Prologue*
*Walt Disney's Bambi*
    *+ Why I chose Bambi*
*Misi, it's life – the premiere*
    *+ Why I chose Misi*
*Mens choir "Sirkat" at their 95th anniversary concert*
    *+ Why I chose the concert critique*
*Charles Dickens – a great poet?*
*Epilogue*
*The log*

At the beginning of the course the student made careful plans, some of which changed, however, during the working process. She worked diligently producing approximately one work per week. All her pieces were rather extensive: for instance, *It's life, Misi* included both a review of the musical's premiere and the translations of four of its songs.

The student's log entries were rather short but informative depicting the work and its progress and, at least to some extent, her feelings during the process. Her high expectations were also expressed in some log entries.

> *2nd May*
> *- started to put on paper the stuff I had in mind. I took quite a while to get my story ready even when I did with the computer. I liked doing it but it was hard to get the text sound proper and personal.*
> *- -*
> *12th-13th May*
> *- wrote down the songs in English and did the critique. It was very hard to do the songs and keep the origin idea.*
> *- -*
> *27th May*
> *- finnished the story about Dickens. It was a bit frustrating and I didn't have as much energy to do it than before. I had the feeling that every story was the same as others. - -*

The student admitted her perfectionism. However, not even positive feedback from her peers could assure her of the quality of her work:

> *"Mä olen hirveen itsekriittinen, musta tuntu että ne ei ollu koskaan tarpeeksi hyviä ja mä luetutin niitä muilla ja ne sano että toihan on hirveen hyvä mutta mä olin että ei, ei se ole."*
> "I'm terribly critical of myself, I always felt that they weren't good enough and I asked others to read them and they said that hey, that's awfully good but I felt that no, no it isn't."

Accordingly, the student summarized her portfolio process in the prologue as follows:

> *I took the port folio very seriously and I didn't have a negative attitude towards it. I chose to write about themes that were somehow close to me. That was probably why I didn't have any major problems. From my point of view they succeeded good. The only problem was that I was too critical about my writing – you can find a little perfectionist beneath my sunny surface.*

## Selection and self-assessment

Because of the great amount of effort and involvement that the student had invested in three of her four pieces, she wanted to choose all those three for the final assessment. She wrote short but concise evaluations of each chosen piece describing both its process, context and relevance as well as its outcomes:

> *WHY I CHOSE BAMBI:*
> *I think this work has succeeded best because I found words to express my feelings. The story is a lot more than just a critique – I put so much of myself in it. I learnt new words while writing it and tried to use proper synonyms. I don't know how I could have made it better. Bambi has been part of me 12 years and still is. That is why writing this was so easy.*

Her high demands for her work were also reflected in the evaluations:

> *WHY I CHOSE MISI:*
> *The critique about Misi actually isn't very good but the songs are the main issue. It was very hard to translate them and still manage to capture the feeling. I never showed them to anyone because they bring out my personality which is very vulnerable. I'm probably afraid that they aren't good enough because it took quite along time to get the translation ready. But the best thing was that I learnt new words.*

She described her perfectionism very colourfully also in the prologue:

> *The hardest part was translating the songs from Misi. It took time and my dear dictionary was almost flying around my room when I didn't find a proper synonym for a word. I didn't want to just translate the songs but bring an atmosphere around them. Hopefully I succeeded.*

In general, the student was proud of her work; yet, she doubted if its standard was high enough for the best grade. In her opinion, a portfolio deserving the highest grade should have been perfect:

> *"En mä kymppiä itselleni antaisi, kyllä mun mielestä pitäisi aikamoinen lehtikirjoittaja olla että saisi kympin tästä kurssista."*
> "I wouldn't give myself a 10, I think that for getting a 10 from this course you should be quite a journalist or something."

## Empowerment

As a whole, the portfolio project seemed empowering for this student. Even though the student demanded a great deal of her work and was not quite convinced that her work came up to the expectations, she was very proud of her portfolio. The most important outcome for her was not the grade anymore but her own satisfaction.

> *Apart from the fits I had when I wasn't satisfied with my works I enjoyed writing and doing the port folio. I did my best and I can't help if that isn't good enough. I have wondered how my works will be evaluated but right now it doesn't make any differense. The most important thing is that I have succeeded in one way or another and even if I don't get a 10 from this course I'm not disappointed. I have already given myself a 10 from trying and crossing my limits. And the most important thing is that I am satisfied with my works and proud of them!*

In terms of learner empowerment, the student took the portfolio very seriously and responsibly and found the self-directed approach suitable and rewarding for herself.

> *The port folio project was a very pleasant for me. I had a chance to work free and write about things I am interested in. It was a different way of expressing my feelings and I discovered a whole new side of me. It was also refreshing to notice what true working is really like. - - The individual working suited me and I managed to keep my planned schedule.*

When discussing language learning during this course, the student said in her interview that the portfolio work had strengthened her writing, grammatical knowledge and vocabulary. Furthermore, she felt that she had gained confidence in her skills of expressing her thoughts and emotions in English, both orally and in writing. She had also enjoyed speaking English with her friends during the course. Hence, she seemed to consider English a vehicle for communication and self-expression. In the epilogue she also discussed the importance of trusting oneself and one's skills in language learning and use:

> *I think the most important thing in learning languages is that you have to trust yourself. Everything doesn't have to be so perfect – people will still understand you.*

However, the only negative thing that the student found in the portfolio course was the small amount of grammar teaching:

> *I would have wanted some teaching in it because it is essential in tests. Of course we had to practise our grammar while writing but it's not the same thing.*

All in all, the student felt happy with, and also empowered by, the portfolio approach. Her perfectionism, nevertheless, still prevailed.

> *This project gave me so much and I'm willing to do a similar one sometimes in the future, specially in languages. Perhaps I then have more experience to do different things better.*

Later on, approximately seven months after the course, she was still happy with the course:

> *Kurssi kannatti mielestäni ehdottomasti, koska englantiin sai paremmin ns. arkielämän kontaktin ja kurssi kannusti käyttämään vieraita kieliä, vaikkei niitä täydellisesti hallitsekaan. (p–e)*
> The course was absolutely worth its while because you got a better 'everyday, real-life' contact to English and the course encouraged you to use foreign languages even if you don't master them perfectly. (p–e)

The portfolio seemed to be an accomplishment that was personally important and relevant for her. Yet, a tinge of perfectionism still shadowed her satisfaction with her pieces of work.

> *Olen edelleen suhteellisen tyytyväinen töihini, joihin olen uhrannut aikaani ja persoonaani. Koko portfolio on siististi arkistoitu lapsia ja lastenlapsia varten. (p–e)*
> I'm still relatively satisfied with my pieces of work in which I have invested a lot of my time and my person. The whole portfolio has been nicely stored for my children and grandchildren. (p–e)

## Misery – a case of constant anxiety

Among the approximately hundred students, there were four students who clearly disliked the portfolio approach but who, nonetheless, worked hard and responsibly. All these students were girls. Their earlier success in English, when measured in grades, varied from poor (5) to satisfactory (7). Among the four, there were two for whom the portfolio process seemed to cause considerable stress and anxiety throughout the whole course. Both of them had previously had a poor English grade (5). This student is one of them.

> *Maanantai 23.5.94*
> *Tein prologin valmiiksi, se oli viimeinen työni ja ehdottomasti huonoin. Enää ei ole väli edes siitä jos työni ovat niin huonoja että en pääse kurssista läpi, kunhan ne on tehty. En enää ikinä halua aloittaa moista urakkaa varsinkin kun en osaa englantia ollenkaan.*
> Monday 23rd May, 94
> I finished the prologue, it was my last and absolutely the worst piece of work. I don't even care anymore if my pieces are so bad that I won't pass the course, as long as they are done. I don't ever want to start a hard job like this again, especially as I can't speak or write English at all.

## The process and the products

*Prologue*
*Andy Summers – guitar man*
*Mad About The Boy*
*The Concert*
*Unforgiven*
*Self-assessment of the chosen work*
*Epilogue*
*Logbook*

Throughout the working process the student felt that this kind of a working method was not for her: she was afraid that she would not be able to assume the responsibility and would not therefore be able to finish her pieces on time. She also feared that her English was not good enough for independent work. Nevertheless, she started planning and also doing her pieces at the beginning of the course and worked rather systematically every week. Consequently, she finished all her actual pieces of work by May 19th, nearly two weeks prior to the deadline. The prologue, epilogue and self-assessments were written by May 23rd: thus, everything was completed well in time.

Another cause of anxiety for her was her English. The student seemed very error-centred: nearly all her comments about her pieces dealt with her "bad English" or grammatical mistakes; in her log entries or self-assessments she rarely discussed the topics and contents of her work, or the reasons why she had decided to do those pieces.

> *Torstai 28.4.94*
> *Tänään kirjoitin aineen loppuun. Kun kirjoitin sitä niin tuntui että siitä ei tule mitään. Kun aine oli valmis niin huokaisin helpotuksesta että se on tehty, mutta silti jäi mieltäni painamaan sen kieliopillinen puoli joka on täysin väärin kirjoitettu. Nyt kun olen tehny kaksi työtä portfoliooni niin olen aivan varma että tällainen työskentely tapa ei sovi minulle. Varmasti niille joilla kielitaito on hyvä, mutta ei sovi oppilaalle jolla on huono kielitaito. Välillä tuntuu nöyryyttävältä kirjoittaa kauheasti englanniksi, kun tietää että se on päin seiniä.*
> Thursday April 28, 94
> Today I finished my essay. When I was writing it I felt that I couldn't make it. When it was finished I was relieved that it was done, but I was still troubled by its grammatical side which was written all wrong. Now that I've done two pieces for my portfolio I'm quite certain that this kind of working method doesn't suit me. Probably it's ok for those whose language skills are good but it doesn't suit students with poor language skills. Sometimes it feels humiliating to write a lot in English when you know that it's all wrong anyway.

Most of the pieces in her portfolio – a portrait, a record review, an essay about Sting's concert and a film review – somehow dealt with music "probably because I listen to music really a lot". All her pieces were rather short, approximately 150 – 200 words long. Because she considered her work so poor, she had refused to show any of her pieces to the teacher for feedback during the working process. She never mentioned asking or getting any feedback from her peers either. Moreover, there was only one reference in her portfolio to any co-operation ("Today I talked with K about our weekend."). Accordingly, it seems that the student drudged alone, very stressed and worried about the responsibility and the quality of her work, but still declining others' help.

### Selection and self-assessment

> *Valitsin kolmeksi työkseni henkilökuvan Andy Summersista, levy arvostelun Mad About the Boy ja viimeiseksi aineeni. Valitsin nämä työt koska viimeinen työ oli kaikista surkein, kun en oikein tiennyt mitä olisin tehnyt. Oikeastaan se on vain täyte työ jotta sain tehtyä tarvitut työt.*
> For my three selected pieces I chose the portrait of Andy Summers, a review of the record Mad About the Boy and, finally, my essay. I chose these pieces because my last piece was the worst as I didn't really know what I would have done. In fact it was just a fill-in so that I got all the necessary pieces done.

On the whole, the student was very discontented with her work. She introduced herself and her work in the prologue as follows:

> *I have to studied in english nine years. Still I am ignorant of the language. My works are very terrible.*

Nevertheless, she found something positive to say about her work in the self-assessment of her chosen pieces:

> *Parhaiten minusta onnistui henkilökuva, siinä vaiheessa oli vielä jonkin verran kiinnostusta. - - Henkilökuva onnistui parhaiten ja minusta tuntuu että se on kieliopillisesti puhtain. Tähän työhön käytin ehdottomasti eniten aikaa. Suosikki työni on ehdottomasti tämä.*
>
> *Mad About The Boy minusta se ei onnistunut yhtä hyvin kuin henkilökuva. Mutta on siinäkin jotain joka onnistui. En osaa oikein arvioida työtä, mutta se on onnistunut aivan kohtalaisesti. Vaikka tekisin sen uudestaan niin en usko että se siitä paranisi.*
>
> In my opinion the portrait succeeded best, at that stage I still had some interest left. - - The portrait came out best and I think that it is grammatically the cleanest. This is definitely the piece I spent most time on. This is absolutely my favourite piece.
>
> Mad About The Boy, I don't think that it succeeded as well as the portrait. But there's something that succeeded in it as well. I can't really assess it but it came out quite all right. Even if I did it again I don't think it would become any better.

Her central if not primary criterion for good work appeared to be the accuracy of the language: the portrait was "grammatically the cleanest" and, when analysing all her work, she wrote:

> *Oikeastaan mikään työ ei poikkea toisistaan kovinkaan paljon. Joissain on enemmän virheitä kuin toisissa.*
>
> Actually all pieces are pretty similar. There are just more mistakes in some than in others.

## Empowerment

During the portfolio course the student often pointed out that she did not trust her ability to take charge of her studies and that she did not like the idea of working on her own. However, according to the questionnaire filled in before the portfolio experiment, she had believed more in her self-direction and responsibility. Thus, the portfolio experiment with the active and responsible student role that it more or less imposed on the students seemed to disempower her. Perhaps the change was too dramatic, and a more gradual release of responsibility would have been needed. On the other hand, the student carried out her work responsibly, put quite a lot of effort into it and also produced all her work well before the deadline. She also achieved a satisfactory grade (7) from this course. Yet, she never enjoyed the work or her role, and she also seemed to worry about all conceivable problems.

> *Olen alusta lähtien vastustanut tällaista työskentely tapaa ja olen edelleenkin sitä vastaan. Tälläinen työskentely sopii varmasti sellaisille jotka osaavat englantia hyvin ja pystyvät tekemään työt ajallaan ja itsenäisesti. - -*
>
> *Kannatan edelleenkin normaalia työskentely tapaa. Varmasti monelle jäi töitä viime tippaan ja siitä taas tulee kauheasti stressiä.*
>
> I have been against this kind of working method from the beginning and I'm still against it. This kind of work suits probably those who know English well and who can do their work on time and independently. - -
>
> I still support the ordinary way to work. Many people must have left their work till the last moment and that causes an awfully lot of stress.

The portfolio experiment did not foster her lingual empowerment either. Both before and after the experiment she evaluated her English skills as "really bad". Furthermore, as seen in her comments above, she seemed to regard the language as a form that she did not master. Communicating meaning through language came out only in two log entry extracts:

> *Tänään keskustelin K kanssa viikonlopustamme. Keskustelu onnistui joten kuten kun K neuvoi muutaman sanan joita en tiennyt.*
>
> Today I talked with K about our weekend. Talking went quite ok when K helped me with a few words I didn't know.

> *Tänään kävin myös lukemassa kirjastolla englannin kielisiä sanomalehtiä, niistä sai aika hyvin selkoa vaikka aivan kaikkia sanoja en osannutkaan.*
>
> Today I also went to the library to read newspapers in English, I could understand them pretty well even though I didn't quite know all the words.

All her other comments focussed on the mistakes and shortcomings of her English, for instance:

> *Tänään kirjoitin osan aineestani. Yritin katsoa oikeat prepositiot kirjasta, mutta silti tuntuu että ne ovat aivan väärin.*
>
> Today I wrote part of my essay. I tried to check the right prepositions from the book but I still feel that they are all wrong.

> *Kaikista vaikeinta/vaikein oli tehdä prologi. Siinä jos jossakin on virheitä.*
> The most difficult thing to do was the prologue. That if any is full of mistakes.

> *Both of works are a bad grammar, like this is.*

All in all, the portfolio approach did not seem to suit this student. It caused considerable stress and anxiety and, moreover, it also appeared to discourage and disempower her as a learner and user of English:

> *Tämä kurssi sai minut jälleen itseni tietoiseksi siitä että en osaa englantia, enkä koskaan varmaan tule oppimaankaan.*
> This course made me once again conscious of the fact that I don't know any English, and I most probably will never even learn.

## Easy Living

> *Making the portfolio was actually very easy. I have nothing to complain about that, but sometimes I wish I could do something challenging.*

There were fewer than 10 students who mentioned that producing a portfolio was very easy or that it took less effort than an ordinary course of English. Among these students there were five students, all male, who took the course rather lightly in terms of effort invested in it but who also liked the course, mainly because of its easiness. The following student is one of these five Easy Living students. Nevertheless, even though he liked the experiment because of its easiness, he wished he could have done something challenging. His English grade prior to this course had been 9.

### The process and the products

PORTFOLIO:
*Foreword*
*Hell on earth – Giger's art*
*Sci-Fi: Dreams of future*
*Last Action Hero*
*Advertisments*
*Epilogue*
*Logbook*

At the beginning of the portfolio course the student had rather ambitious and original plans: he wanted to produce the whole portfolio under the theme of cyberpunk. This idea seems to have taken some planning and effort, but about two weeks later it was abandoned because it had proved too difficult. The student also doubted if virtual reality – the topic of his first cyberpunk piece – was "really culture". Instead, he decided to produce pieces dealing with different themes and subjects of culture.

The student wrote four essays: a portrait of Giger's art, an essay on science fiction and "the feeling that Sci-Fi gives me", a film review and an essay on TV commercials. All the pieces were typed and about 300–400 words long. They were fluent but somehow they appeared a little unpolished, as the teacher commented in the final assessment:

> Kirjoitat sujuvasti, kuten yleensä. Kuten jo aiemmin kirjoitin, olisit varmasti hyötynyt siitä, että olisit ehtinyt viimeistellä työsi; jonkinlaista 'viimeistä silausta' jäin kaipaamaan, sillä kykysi olisivat riittäneet siihenkin. Suuria kielellisiä puutteita ei ole, vaan kyse on pienistä epätarkkuuksista.
> You write fluently, as usual. As I wrote earlier you and your work would have benefited if you had had time to polish your pieces; I missed some sort of final polish because your skills would have allowed it. No bigger deficiences in the language, your mistakes are mainly small inaccuracies.

The logbook conveys the feeling that after the student had abandoned his original cyberpunk plans, he produced the pieces rather effortlessly, without a long working process or very much deliberation. Nevertheless, the first finished piece had probably taken some background investigation even though that is not explicitly mentioned in the log. His log consists of a total of ten entries:

20. 4. *Some thinking. My idea of portfolio's theme is cyberpunk genre. I wrote some notes and started working my first essay: Virtual reality.*
25. 4. *Continued my working on cyberpunk. About 1 hour I think.*
26. 4. *My friend gave me an artbook. It's about horror art and I think it's a good subject to write about.*
3. 5. *Started and finished one work: Hell on earth – Giger's Art. It took about 1/2 hour to write.*
4. 5. *Virtual Reality isn't really culture, so I decided to abandon that idea. And cyberpunk theme is too difficult to make. I think it's better to divide my portfolio into different subjects and themes*

| | |
|---|---|
| 9. 5. | *Got an idea. I'll write about Sci-Fi generally. Started today.* |
| 10. 5. | *Finished Sci-Fi.* |
| 13. 5. | *Watched a film: Last Action hero. Above-average action movie. It's a easy subject, so that will be my next work. Today I don't have time to write it.* |
| 16. 5. | *First i wrote that Last Action project on paper in school. In the evening i wrote it again on type-writer. Both works are different, but it doesn't matter.* |
| 25. 5. | *I wrote my last work. It's about commercials. I think it's apporiate, because what else form of art is shown more to us than advertisments?* |

However, as the student did not mention whether he had marked all his work in the log or not, it is somewhat doubtful to make definite conclusions about his working process on the basis of these ten log entries.

### Selection and self-assessment

In his prologue, or foreword as he called it, the student introduced all of his pieces by telling about the context of each piece, for instance how he got the idea for the piece.

> *First essay is about art. About four weeks ago my frend gave me an artbook. It pictured horror paintings, so I tought that it would be good idea to write about. Horror has always fascinated me. I watch horror movies and read horror books, but I have never been intrested in horror art.*

However, besides these introductions, there was very little self-assessment in his portfolio. In the foreword, there were only two mentions where the student assessed his own work or its process:

> *Third is movie criticism. It's the worst of these four essays. It's typical English home-essay. The idea to write it just popped to my head after I watched it on video.*

> *Last, but not the least, is the essay about TV commercials. - - This essay was fun to write.*

Moreover, the student did not select any of his pieces for the final assessment nor did he give any reasons for not choosing or assessing his pieces. It seems that the student had felt that it was enough to produce the required pieces to demonstrate his English skills – everything else was unnecessary. He did not aim at perfection, nor at extending or expanding his skills. He admitted this in his interview:

> *"Mä ajattelin ettei tässä tason tarvii mielettömän korkee olla, mä kirjotin ihan niinkuin normaaleja englannin aineita, 300–400 sanan aineita."*
> "I reckoned that the level in here didn't need to be awfully high, I just wrote like ordinary English essays, essays of 300–400 words."

> *"Tein mitä käskettiin mutta en tehnyt yhtään ylimääräistä ja ne mun aineet mitä mä kirjotin, ne on niinku sellasia tyypillisiä englannin aineita mistä saa kokeissa aika hyvät pisteet mutta tämmösenä syvällisempänä työnä niistä ei paljon pisteitä tuu."*
> "I did what we were told to do but nothing extra and the essays I wrote are like typical English essays that give you pretty good points in tests but as this kind of more profound work they don't get too many points."

In the epilogue, the student assessed both his own learning and the portfolio approach as follows:

> *Making the portfolio was actually very easy. I have nothing to complain about that, but sometimes I wish I could do something challenging. The theme of portfolios was weird: culture. i think the idea was to make us familiar with english culture. I didn't learn anything new. But I had the possibility to learn, so it must be my fault.*

> *The positive things? You get something special to work on, you get routine in writing in english, and you can yourself decide on the rate-of-work you want to work (rate-of-work = the speed you want to work = how fast you want to make your portfolio done).*

The student seemed ready to assume the responsibility for not having learnt anything new. Nevertheless, he wished that he could have done something challenging. Yet again, the initial idea of a cyberpunk portfolio was abandoned because of its difficulty, and the film review was written because the task was easy. Furthermore, the student commented on his portrait of Giger's work: "It took about 1/2 hour to write". The theme of producing work in as little time as possible came up also in his interview: the only thing that he said he had learnt during this course was to write longer essays in English faster.

When interviewed, the student seemed a little disappointed with his effort during the portfolio course. He had planned to produce a better portfolio but he was "too lazy" and somehow he lost interest. He also offered another reason for his lack of effort: he suspected that good students – like himself – would not invest any more work in their portfolios than was necessary to demonstrate their skills and to get a good enough grade:

> *"Ne on tietosia siitä että ne osaa sitä englantia niin ei ne viitti siihen panostaa – en mä ainakaan viittinyt – mä itteni mielestä osaan riittävän hyvin englantia lukiotasoiseksi oppilaaksi."*
> "They know that they are good at English and so they don't bother to put that much effort or work into it – at least I didn't – in my opinion I'm good enough at English for a senior secondary school student."

## Empowerment

The student seemed to regard language proficiency as a practical skill for communicating meaning rather than as mastery of structural or orthographical finesses. Furthermore, he did not see foreign language education at school very efficient nor very relevant for him. In his opinion, the teaching and assessment focussed too heavily on "grammatical details" and multiple-choice tests, and thus had little practical relevance. In this respect, he considered producing work in English a better test of students' real English skills. Therefore, he considered the portfolio approach, at least as one separate course or as an option, a good idea even though he did not particularly like culture as its topic. He also preferred the portfolio experiment to an ordinary course because of the students' own choices and the freedom which it allowed.

The freedom also allowed him to take the course quite easily. On the other hand, he thought that some control might have been needed to secure both the quantity and quality of work. However, although he was not quite satisfied with his own effort and responsibility, he did not believe that he would do anything differently if he were given a second chance:

> *"Laiska oppilas on laiska ja ahkera on aina ahkera."*
> "A lazy student is lazy and a hard-working one is always hard-working."

Thus, in terms of taking charge of one's studying actively and responsibly in order to fulfil one's potential, the student did not seem very learner-empowered: he managed quite well and did what was required for passing the course and getting a satisfactory grade, but he clearly did not do his best.

Nevertheless, the student appeared quite empowered as a person, since he believed in himself and his capacities. He also believed in his language skills. Thus, the portfolio experiment did not notably increase nor decrease his lingual empowerment: he trusted his English skills and used them willingly and readily in practice – just as he had done before the experiment when he evaluated his English proficiency in the questionnaire as follows:

> *Osaan lukea normaalia englantia sujuvasti. Sanavarasto minulla on yli keskiverron ja osaan soveltaa sitä. En osaa kielioppia vaan suoritan tekemiseni ns. "kielikorvalla." Suullista harjoittelua on vähän, mutta uskon olevani hyvä siinä. (Q1)*
> I can read normal English fluently. My vocabulary is above the average and I can apply it. I don't know the grammar but I use my "ear". We have practised spoken English little but I believe I'm good at it. (Q1)

On the whole, even if the student did not seem very learner- empowered, he appeared rather empowered as a person. But perhaps the student's goals for school were to do well enough with as little effort and time as possible and to spare his energy and time for matters and activities more relevant for him.

## The Opponents: Portfolio is hell

There were nine students, all male, who neither liked the portfolio course nor really tried to work very actively or responsibly. The students' previous success in English, if measured in their grades, did not seem to account for their dislike towards this course: their grades ranged somewhat evenly between poor (5) and very good (9). However, seven out of these nine students were from the same English group. In his interview, one of them described the situation and atmosphere in that English group as follows:

> *"Jotenkin vaan tota muodostu siitä semmonen mielikuva lähes koko luokkaan että se jotenkin ei iskeny."*
> "Well, there was somehow an impression about it nearly in the whole group that it just didn't really sort of interest us."

Among the nine students, the attitudes towards, and experiences of, the portfolio approach varied from slightly negative to strongly negative:

> *Kurssi ei ollut minulle kovin antoisa, mikä tietenkin johtuu suurimmaksi osaksi itsestäni, koska en ole kovin kultturelli enkä myöskään kovin ahkera.*
> The course wasn't very rewarding or productive for me, which, of course, was mostly because I'm neither very cultural nor very hardworking.

*Jaa että mitä sanottavaa minulla on kyseistä kurssista? Tuohon kysymykseen vastaamiseen kuluisi enemmän painokelvottomia sanoja kuin jaksaisin kirjoittaa joten jätän ne nyt pois.*
What do I have to say about this course? To answer that question would take more foul, unprintable words than I could write so I leave them out now.

Furthermore, the amount of effort and time invested in this course also varied; some students were perhaps a little ashamed of their laziness, whereas some nearly boasted of how little time they had used.

*"Henkilökohtaisesti se ei ole mua varten luotu, olen sen verran laiska luonne."*
"Personally, it's not for me, I'm that much lazy a person."

*When somebody evaluates my works, I hope she'll notice how little time I used. I think that my works are almost good for works made in that little time.*

Most of these students disliked culture as a topic and, moreover, they felt that they had not learnt much, if anything.

*En nyt tiedä uudesta oppimisesta, ehkä kirjoituspuoli saattoi vähän parantua. (Q2)*
I don't really know about learning anything new, perhaps my writing may have improved a bit. (Q2)

*Aivan turhaa ajanhukkaa. Oppilaat pakotetaan tekemään täysin järjettömiä töitä mielenkiinnottomista aiheista. Koko kurssi oli aivan turha koska tässä ei opi yhtään mitään vaan käyttää jo osaamiaan asioita.*
A complete waste of time. Students are forced to produce utterly senseless pieces of work about uninteresting topics. The whole course was totally useless because you don't learn anything here but, instead, you use the things you already know.

Many of the students preferred teacher-directed teaching because they experienced it either easier or more effective. Furthermore, many students doubted their own diligence and responsibility in taking charge of their studies. In general, however, they seemed to regard their English skills as reasonably good in practice, even if they had some weaker areas in their language skills.

*Ymmärrän hyvin (kuuntelu sujuu), puhun kohtalaisesti, kirjoitan kohtalaisesti, mutta en kovin kieliopillisesti. Käytän vähän, ei oo paljoo tullu matkusteltuu viime aikoina. (Q2)*

> I understand well (listening goes ok), I speak reasonably well, I write reasonably well even though not quite grammatically. I use English pretty little, haven't been travelling much lately. (Q2)

> *Osaan kyllä niitä taitoja, joita tarvitsen, mutta mikäli asiaan ei ole mielenkiintoa, en vaivaudu sitä edes opiskelemaan. (Q2)*
> I'm pretty good at the skills I need, but if I have no interest in the matter, I don't even bother to study it. (Q2)

The following case portrays one of the more critical and adamant opponents of the portfolio approach. Although he was neither the average nor the most extreme representative of this group, his case illustrates and exemplifies rather clearly the traits that most of these nine students shared. His previous English grade had been 7.

> *I'm a 17 years old English student. My hobbies are not in culture. Maybe that is one reason why my works aren't so good.*

### The process and the products

*Prologue*
*A video introducing museums in Jyväskylä (a groupwork) and its self-assessment*
*Ovidius: Ars amatoria – a book review and its self-assessment*
*Hey You – a poem*
*Reclining figure – a poem*
*Epilogue*
*Logbook*

The student summed up his working process in his epilogue:

> *Olen erittäin laiska tekemään kaikkea ja se näkyi (toivottavasti ei näy) töiden teossa. Jätin kaiken viime tippaan, mitä ei tietenkään olisi pitänyt tehdä. Kurssin loppu valvotti minua oikein kunnolla.*
> *I'm very lazy to do anything and you could see that (hopefully you can't) in my working process. I put everything off to the last minute, which I, of course, shouldn't have done. The end of the course really meant sleepless nights for me.*

According to his log, he had started planning his work right from the beginning. He planned for a week but did not produce anything during that time. Then he gave up for approximately three weeks: there were no log entries between April 26th and May 18th. Consequently, the end of the course was hectic for him:

> Monday 30.5.
> *The last day to give the works to the teacher! It's 9.45 a.m. and I'm starting my third work of portfolio. This is not fun anymore.*
> *Now it's 10.15 and my third work is ready. I'm taking a little break which, I think, I have had very many on this course. (That time I'm, however, making plans to the fourth work.*
> *It's still Monday 30.5.*
> *(12.15 p.m.) I'm starting making fourth work. After I've made all those four work, I had to make epilog, prolog and introduces of the works.*

The student produced a video about the museums in Jyväskylä with his classmates, a book review and two poems. The poems were both written on the deadline day.

## Selection and self-assessment

The student's selection for his final pieces seemed quite influenced by his working process: the last two pieces, which were both produced on the last day, were not selected.

> *Kahteen ensimmäiseen työhöni (video ja kirja-arvostelu) paneuduin oikein kunnolla ja kerkesin tehdä eri versioita.*
> The first two pieces (the video and the book review) I concentrated properly on and I had time to do several drafts.

The video introducing museums in Jyväskylä was the student's favourite work and he seemed satisfied both with its process and learning outcomes:

> *Erilainen työtapa kuin normaalisti antoi intoa tehdä yhdessä porukalla hyvän videon. Kaikki hauskuus ei läheskään näy videosta, mitä meillä oli sitä tehdessä. Englannin opiskelussa suullinen taito jää liian vähiin, joten nyt tuli opeteltua sitäkin (tärkeämpää kuin kielioppi: minun mielipiteeni).*
> The working method that was different from the ordinary motivated us as a group to make a good video together. You can't see from the video all that fun we had when we were making it. We don't practise oral skills enough in our English studies so now we could learn that, too (it's more important than grammar in my opinion).

The book review of *Ars amatoria* by Odivius was his second selection:

> *Äidinkielen tunnille piti lukea kirja ja tehdä siitä arvostelu, joten miksi en arvostelisi sitä englanniksikin. Ajattelin täytetyöksi, mutta panostin siihen niin paljon ja pidin siitä, että päätin valita mukaan.*
> *Opetti lähinnä vain uusia sanoja ja kertasi vanhoja. Tähän minulla oli aikaa tehdä useita versioita ja korjata niitä joten lopputulos oli mielestäni hyvä.*
> We had to read a book and make a book report of it for Mother tongue classes, so why not make a review of it in English as well. I first thought it would be a fill-in piece but I put so much effort into it and I liked it, so I decided to choose it.
> Doing it taught me mainly just new words and revised old ones. I had time to do several drafts of this one and also correct and improve them so in my opinion the result is good.

According to these self-assessments, the student did not appear very disappointed with the course or with his own work. Two or three days prior to the deadline, even though he still had two pieces to produce, the student would have given himself a fairly good grade for this course:

> *7 tai 8. Olen laiska, olen jättänyt hommat viime tippaan (tai-sana tarkoittaa etten tiedä vielä kahdesta työstä mitään) mutta kuitenkin teen kaikki työt. (Q2)*
> 7 or 8. I'm lazy, I've left everything to the last minute ('or' means that I don't have any idea of the last two pieces yet) but I will do all the pieces. (Q2)

However, the tone of his final evaluation of the portfolio approach in the epilogue was very different:

> *En kannata tällaista opiskelumenetelmä (kokeiluksi, vaihteluksi enkä edes kostoksi itseäni vastaan tehdyn vääryyden vuoksi) kenellekään. Tämä on aivan liian suuri töinen eikä silti opeta sitä, mitä mielestäni koulussa pitäisi oppia. Olen siis perinteisen opettajajohtoisen opetuksen kannalla ehdottomasti. Eihän tämä ole järkevää opettajaa kohtaan, hänellehän kasautuvat kaikki koko kurssin tarkastukset samaan aikaan.*
>
> *Vaadin koulun englannin opetukselta mielestäni paljon, koska pidän kieltä ja niiden opiskelua erittäin tärkeinä. Tiedossani on vain yksi kunnollinen opetustapa ja se ei ole portfolio.*
> I don't recommend this kind of study method (as an experiment, a change or not even to revenge the wrong doing I was submitted to) to anyone.This demands much too much work and still doesn't teach what I think we should learn at school. Thus, I absolutely prefer the traditional teacher-directed teaching. This isn't sensible for the teacher either, she'll have to correct all the stuff at the same time.
>
> I demand a lot from the school 's English teaching because I consider language and their studies important. I know only one proper teaching method and that is not the portfolio.

## Empowerment

The student's own view of his empowerment seemed ambiguous: in both of the questionnaires, he said that he could make decisions and assessments concerning his studies and was also able and willing to carry the responsibility but, on the other hand, he did not believe that he would work responsibly and diligently in practice:

> *Osaan itse päättää mutta en tee päätökseni mukaan (olen laiska). (Q1)*
> I'm capable of deciding myself but I won't do according to my decision (I'm lazy). (Q1)

Therefore, he considered teacher-directed teaching the only efficient option:

> *Ainut keino saada kaikki opiskelemaan (ainakin minut). (Q2)*
> The only way to make everybody study (me at least). (Q2)

Accordingly, the experiment did not seem to enhance his learner empowerment: the student did not assume an active role in his studying in order to fulfil his potential. Moreover, as he considered transmission of knowledge the only proper teaching and learning style at school, he did not seem to think that he even should have assumed a more active role. Furthermore, he seemed to consider his laziness such a strong trait of character that it overcame any need or wish to change. However, he did not completely deny his responsibility for not learning much during this course:

> *En oppinut (enkä kyllä yrittänytkään) juuri mitään. Ehkä muutama sana tarttui mutta en mitään muuta. Opiskelin laiskasti, vietin hyppytunteja...(Q2)*
> I didn't learn (but I didn't even try) really anything. Perhaps a few words but nothing more. I studied lazily, didn't work during the personal study lessons...(Q2)

The student's lingual empowerment appeared unaffected by the portfolio experiment:

> *Englannin kielen tietoni ja taitoni eivät lisääntyneet havaittavasti kurssin aikana ja edelleen olen yhtä halukas käyttämään kieltä aina kuin vain mahdollista (se ei siis huonontanut tilannetta). (p–e)*
> My skills and knowledge of the English language didn't notably increase during the course and I'm still just as willing to use the language whenever it's possible as before (so it didn't worsen the situation). (p–e)

Furthermore, his assessments of language proficiency in general and of his own English skills before and after the portfolio project were very similar. He considered practical effectiveness of communication more important than grammatical accuracy, and also believed in his own communication skills.

> *Kielioppi ei välttämättä ole paras mahdollinen mutta suullisesti kenen tahansa ulkomaalaisen kanssa olen tähän asti saanut asiat selviksi. Pärjään englannilla. (Q2)*
> My grammar isn't necessarily the best possible, but orally I have so far managed to get things straight with any foreigner. I manage all right in English. (Q2)

Nevertheless, although the portfolio programme did not appear to decrease his lingual empowerment in terms of his willingness to use the language, it seemed to have had somewhat negative effects on his English studies later on, as the following extract from his post-epilogue shows:

> *Portfolio (joka jo kirosanana tunnetaan) ja sen ympärille muotoutunut kurssi oli minulle ikävä velvollisuus, joka ei opettanut juuri mitään. - - Tästä kyseisestä kurssista lähtien en ole tullut toimeen opettajankaan kanssa niin hyvin kuin aikaisemmin! Syytä en tiedä. Töitäkin teen yhtä ahkerasti kuin aikaisemmin. Jonkin näköinen viha vain nousi ja nousee vieläkin kun ajattelee tuota kurssia. (p-e)*
> Portfolio (already known as a swearword) and the course around it was an unpleasant obligation for me that didn't really teach anything. - - Since that course, I haven't even got along with the teacher as well as before! I don't know why. I even work as hard as before. Some sort of anger just arose and still arises when I think of that course. (p-e)

Concerning the foreign language education at school, the student set rather contradictory requirements. In his epilogue he considered teacher-direction the only proper way to teach and study foreign language at school. Yet, at the beginning of the portfolio course he had called for more authenticity and practicality in foreign language teaching:

> *Käytännönläheisyyttä lisää, ei kielioppi ole tärkeää normaalissa elämässä, kyllä englanninkieliset ymmärtävät vaikka esim. artikkeli puuttuu. (Q1)*
> More practicality, grammar isn't that important in ordinary life, people who speak English will understand even if an article is missing, for instance. (Q1)

Moreover, the student wrote that when they had been making the video, he had practised speaking English, which he considered important.

> *Englannin opiskelussa suullinen taito jää liian vähiin, joten nyt tuli opeteltua sitäkin (tärkeämpää kuin kielioppi: minun mielipiteeni).- -*
> We don't practise oral skills enough in our English studies so now we could learn that, too (it's more important than grammar in my opinion).

However, at the end of the course he insisted that he had not learnt anything, probably because they had not had proper teacher-directed English lessons. Thus, it seems that his views of both language and language learning and teaching were somewhat contradictory. Or perhaps the conflicting ideas were influenced by his view of school and its function:

> *Tämä on aivan liian suuri töinen eikä silti opeta sitä, mitä mielestäni koulussa pitäisi oppia.*
> There's much too much work in this and still it doesn't teach us what I think we should learn at school.

It may also be that the student did not really consider this as a course to practise English but as another school course to be passed: the less work, the better.

In summary, albeit the student did not appear learner-empowered, he seemed quite lingually empowered in the sense that he trusted his English skills and willingly used English whenever he had the opportunity. Furthermore, the student appeared to be personally empowered. He dared to state his opinions and act accordingly: if something did not please him or if he did not consider something appropriate, he dared to reject it, even at the risk of getting a worse grade. Therefore, the student appeared to know himself and what he wanted both from life and from school.

So did the other students of this group. These nine students seemed to think that the purpose of school education was to *teach* or to *hand them* the information and skills needed for passing the courses and getting the grades and, finally, for obtaining the upper secondary school qualifications. Students' very active role in learning did not thus meet the expectations that they had for school. One of these students expressed his point of view as follows:

> *Haluaisin, että lukion loppuaikana ei olisi tällaisia kursseja. Eiköhän näitä ehdi tehdä sitten armeijan jälkeen yliopistolla.*
> I hope we won't have courses like this during the rest of our senior secondary school. We'll probably have enough time to do our share of this kind of working at university after army.

Naturally, at least in some cases, the opposition and rejection that seemed to be based on personal empowerment may also have been an excuse for laziness and low motivation for school work.

CHAPTER 3

# Summary and discussion of the portfolio profiles and portraits

In order to analyse the portfolios as a vehicle for the students' empowerment, all the approximately 100 portfolios were analysed with the help of a four-field map. The dimensions of the map were the students' learner empowerment and their positive or negative experiences. According to the analysis, a good 80 students were considered to have taken an active and responsible learner role. Their working processes were not necessarily easy: sometimes the work was mere toil, and perhaps some students would rather have given up. Nevertheless, the students compiled their portfolios, and at the end of the course both the students themselves and their teachers agreed that they had worked hard, some students probably much harder than during an ordinary, more teacher-directed course. Thus, it could perhaps be claimed that the portfolio programme somehow either fostered or provided opportunities for these students' learner empowerment.

Nevertheless, among these 83 students there were four students who were considered learner-empowered in the sense that they responsible fulfilled the requirements but as their working processes were full of toil and anxiety, the experience was hardly considered very empowering by the students themselves. Thus, in spite of their rather good results, both in terms of responsibility and grades, the portfolio programme most probably did not foster their learner empowerment in the sense that they would be more ready or willing to assume an active and self-directed role in learning. They did assume the responsibility, but it seemed likely that their responsibility was based on diligence and on the feeling that they did not dare to object or reject the portfolio approach. In other words, the students drudged in order to pass the course.

In contrast, there were 14 students whose working processes during the course did not appear very active. Accordingly, these students produced considerably little work in their portfolios. In general, the students did not do their best: "the less work, the better" seemed to be their motto. All these 14 students were boys.

On the basis of the dimension of students' affective and volitional experiences and reactions, 84 students were considered to have liked the course. To be more precise, I should perhaps say that these 84 students did not dislike the course as their experiences of the portfolio approach ranged from neutral acceptance to enthusiasm and flow. Thus, since affective and volitional domains play a significant role in studying as well as in learning, it might be justified to say that for these 84 students the portfolio approach was somehow an empowering experience.

However, I would not go as far as to claim that the course was empowering to all these circa 85 students. Nor would I dare to claim that the portfolio approach was an empowering experience for all the 79 students who were located in the field of high learner empowerment and positive affective and volitional experiences. Yet, I would claim that many of these 79 students considered the portfolio approach somehow empowering. Perhaps their learner empowerment was already very high but, nevertheless, the course provided them an opportunity to test or enhance their learning skills, self-direction or engagement. Moreover, the portfolio approach gave them a chance to negotiate their own goals, topics, methods and time tables: it gave the students the acknowledged decision-making power and a more equal status of an active and responsible participant in the learning process. Furthermore, the portfolio approach most probably offered them a welcomed break from the ordinary routine. Most importantly, it fostered many students' lingual empowerment both in terms of cognitive, affective and volitional domains.

However, a far more important outcome than numbers or percentages of students in each field is the fact that the locating of all the portfolio cases on the four-field map indicated different types of portfolio cases. From these portfolio profile groups, different, prominent portfolio cases were selected for more thorough analysis. In addition to unfolding detailed information about the selected individual cases, the analysis also illuminated and clarified more general features concerning the totality of all the portfolio cases.

When comparing the selected cases portrayed above, a striking difference can be found in the students' approach and attitude towards their own learning. The students of high learner empowerment and positive affective and volitional experiences, namely the case of Constant Flow, the Perfectionist and the Greatest Gainers, assumed the responsibility for their work and learning. Moreover, in order to test and improve their skills, they set goals that would best benefit their learning needs and interests. In other words, they seemed to be *intrinsically motivated:* they took the portfolio course as a personal chance to take charge of their own learning in order to fulfil their potentials on the basis of their needs and interests. In accordance, based on their own individual skills, interests and needs, the Perfectionists set their goals extremely high aiming at perfection, the cases of Constant Flow set goals that totally absorbed them in the work and the Greatest Gainers matched their challenges and skills so that the goals were sometimes very original and personal, sometimes perhaps more modest but that, primarily, were both challenging and attainable and therefore rewarding and empowering.

In contrast, the other portrayed cases, namely Misery, Easy Living and the Opponent, seemed to take the portfolio course rather *instrumentally:* passing the course and perhaps getting a satisfactory grade seemed to be their main – if not also the only – objective. There were, however, considerable differences in their learner empowerment in the sense of assuming the responsibility for their work.

The Easy Living student and the Opponent were considered to have rather low learner empowerment. They both seemed to want to pass the course and get the grade with as little effort as possible. To some extent, they seemed to consider school only as a gateway, a place to be passed to get the needed qualifications, not really as a place where one should extend oneself in order to learn as much as possible. In consequence, they did not set any particular personal learning goals, nor did they particularly attempt at improving their skills. These features also characterized other Easy Living students and other Opponents.

However, the Easy Living student was perhaps slightly more prepared to take charge of his studies and to take the responsibility for his work. He also liked the portfolio approach because of its freedom and self-direction, which allowed him to take the course in a relaxed manner. He seemed to trust his skills. For instance, his prior success in English had been very good and he clearly trusted his skills of English. Also, although considering himself lazy, he did not seem to doubt his learning skills very much. Yet, he did not seem very willing to test or stretch his limits, to extend either his skills of English or his skills of self-direction. In other words, passing the course and getting a satisfactory grade in an easy way seemed to be a more desirable goal for him than assuming a very active and involved role in learning.

The Opponent, for his part, did not appear willing to assume or accept the role given to him. First of all, he was not interested in the topic area of the course. Secondly, the idea of the whole portfolio course was met with general resistance among his closest classmates. Also, an active and responsible learner role did not meet his expectations or schemata for school work. Thus, he rejected the new learner role as undesirable and even inappropriate. For similar reasons, so did the other Opponents.

Yet, although considering himself rather lazy, the portrayed Opponent did not seem to otherwise doubt his resources and skills, at least not his English proficiency. In consequence, the difference in the trust in their English skills did not seem to account for the difference in attitude between the portrayed Opponent and the Easy Living student. Nor did it explain it between the groups of Easy Living students and the Opponents in general. Both the Easy Living students and the Opponents also considered the willingness and courage to use language actively a far more important feature of good language proficiency than linguistic accuracy. These students' 'personal empowerment' in general did not explain the difference in their attitudes towards the portfolio course either: they appeared to trust themselves and to have rather clear and strong opinions as well as somewhat definite ideas of what they wanted to do in the future. What could then explain the difference? Although the portrayed Easy Living student regarded himself as lazy, perhaps he liked the course because he still trusted his self-direction and his English skills slightly more than the portrayed Opponent, so that the portfolio work did not seem to be beyond his capacities at any point. However, at least three or four of the Opponents had previously had good success in their English studies so they probably did not consider the portfolio course to be beyond their language skills at any point. Another explanation could be that the Opponents' negative attitudes were firstly evoked by their low self-direction and diligence – in their own words, their laziness – and then strengthened by similarly negative attitudes of their closest classmates. Or vice versa: some student's negative attitude spread in the group and was then strengthened by the students' laziness. Since seven out of the nine Opponents were in the same English group, the group and its prevailing atmosphere seems to have had a rather strong influence on the students' attitudes. Unfortunately, the data and the practical constraints of this study did not allow further analysis of the matter.

Also the Anxiety student seemed to regard the portfolio course as another course to be passed. However, she clearly differed from the Opponent and the Easy Living student in the sense that she did not trust her skills of English at all. Nor did she trust her learning skills: she strongly doubted her ability to take an active role and to take charge of her work. Thus, she experienced the goal of passing the portfolio course to be beyond her capacities. However, being a diligent student, she did not dare to object or reject her responsibility but, instead, toiled and drudged in a manner filled with anxiety. Although working very seriously and diligently, she did not seem to set any personal learning goals for herself. Apparently, she did not believe that she could learn anything, at least in this fashion. Perhaps defeated by her earlier self-directed efforts or discouraged by her prior learning experiences in general, she seemed overwhelmed by the course and its requirements and, therefore, completely convinced that the portfolio programme would be an impossible task for her. Furthermore, her definition of language proficiency seemed very error-centred and, thus, she considered her English skills so inadequate that she could not possibly be able to produce any work in English. Yet, she was among the first ones to complete her work and, later on, her work was rewarded with a satisfactory grade, which was clearly better than her earlier grades. Albeit having successfully completed her work, she stated in her epilogue that the portfolio course had once more crystallized that fact that she could not use or learn English. Out of the four Anxiety students, another student experienced the portfolio approach also as constant angst, the other two students regarded it rather as unbeneficial toil. In sum, because of not trusting their skills – their learning skills, their skills of self-direction and, in particular, their English skills – the Anxiety students considered the portfolio programme an unrewarding toil at best and, at worst, a disempowering and discouraging misery.

In contrast, the Greatest Gainer portrayed first, namely Why Does My Heart Beat So, seemed to embrace the portfolio approach whole-heartedly. Yet, in terms of grades, her prior success in English had been as poor as that of the Misery student. In short, although their English proficiency levels were probably fairly similar, Misery considered the portfolio course a burden that had negative influence on her language use and on her future learning of English, but Why Does My Heart Beat So considered it an empowering opportunity that encouraged and enhanced her studies and use of English. This seemed to the case also on a more general level: although some of the Greatest Gainers had had just as poor or even poorer success in their prior English studies than the Anxiety students, the Greatest Gainers seemed to consider the portfolio approach a personal and empowering chance to direct their studying on the basis of their own learning needs, interests and skills. Could the main difference be that the Greatest Gainers still believed in their resources and in their capacity to learn? Were the Greatest Gainers more self-directed as students before the portfolio programme? They clearly saw the course as an opportunity for learning, not only as a course to be passed. Whether they were more intrinsically motivated by nature, or whether the portfolio approach and its student-centredness and self-direction generated or promoted their intrinsic motivation, cannot be answered on the basis of the data. Among the approximately 25 Greatest Gainers, there were most probably both very self-directed and intrinsically motivated students and those whose motivation, interest and self-direction were raised and strengthened by the portfolio approach and its different features.

Thus, these cases seem to corroborate the ideas of empowerment presented in this thesis. First of all, giving the decision-making power is not enough to empower learners. They also need resources. However, giving resources, such as ideas, materials, instruction, help and support, is not necessarily enough, either. Thus, a person cannot become truly empowered as a passive object: instead, the person has to accept and assume an active and responsible role in his or her actions. Although the person's perception of his or her skills and resources sometimes affects the will to assume an active role, that will does not seem to *depend* on the person's skills or resources or on his or her perception of them (cf. e.g. Cochran 1988). The person's self-concept and self-esteem may also influence the volition, but they do not seem to explain it in all cases. Thus, the volition to take an active and empowered role in one's actions seems to also require belief that the active role is beneficial and desirable (cf. Braye & Preston-Shoot 1995, 114). At least in some cases and to some extent, that will and belief can probably be fostered through careful scaffolding, guidance and support in an atmosphere of mutual trust, but it cannot be forced. However, getting *a chance* to develop one's empowerment is of paramount importance: without giving students an active learner role and real and meaningful opportunities to take charge of, and responsibility for, their actions, students' empowerment can hardly be expected to grow and flourish.

# Epilogue

The purpose of this study was twofold. Firstly, one of the aims of this portfolio study was to introduce portfolios into Finnish foreign language education and to develop the portfolio approach as a pedagogical innovation. For some years before the present portfolio programme, portfolios had gained ground in various subjects at all school levels in many countries and, by a host of educators, they had also been advocated as a vehicle for individualizing learning and assessment as well as for empowering students and teachers. Yet, in 1994, reports of foreign language portfolio experiments were rather scarce.

In this respect, the study reached its goals. Not only were the portfolios tried out as a learning and assessment tool with these approximately 100 students, but all the participating teachers have somehow continued to use and develop portfolios or ideas gained during the portfolio programme in their teaching. Furthermore, since returning to teaching, I have had two portfolio-based culture courses and I have also used adaptations of portfolios in different courses. Therefore, we have not only tried out but also developed the use of portfolios in foreign language teaching. Furthermore, the portfolio programme opened new aspects to teaching and learning that have influenced my teaching practice. Thus, as action research should, the portfolio programme has improved my action. Moreover, many other foreign language teachers have become interested in the portfolio approach and have adapted it to their teaching. Thus, the development and use have continued and grown.

Secondly, and more specifically, the present portfolio innovation aimed at fostering the students' empowerment in the context of upper secondary school

English studies. Although foreign language education has moved towards a more communicative and functional approach and towards an emphasis of students' individual strengths and willingness to communicate in a foreign language, foreign language education is still often textbook and teacher-directed. In the upper secondary school, the matriculation examination also often influences the classroom teaching practices. Hence, the present study aimed at trying out porfolios as a means of making the studying more individual, student-centred and also more self-directed. The aim was to foster the students' learner empowerment, namely their active and responsible but also acknowledged role in learning, as well as their lingual empowerment, their readiness and willingness to use their skills of English actively.

As many earlier reports had advocated, portfolios proved to offer a vehicle for individualizing both studying, learning and asssessment also in our portfolio programme. Most students accepted and even welcomed the more active, powerful and responsible learner role and did not have any major problems with their portfolio processes. However, the process of implementing portfolios proved perhaps more problematic than was expected, because in total the students' readiness and willingness to assume their more self-directed learner role varied considerably.

In accordance, the students seemed to consider the different features of the portfolio programme differently. Furthermore, what was seen as an advantage by most students was at the same time viewed as a disadvantage by some others. For instance, while most students considered setting their own goals and choosing their own learning tasks and topics an opportunity to individualize their learning, some students considered it an unnecessary burden or even a hindrance for any 'proper' learning. Also, whereas most students regarded the portfolio approach as refreshing and beneficial because of its emphasis on the students' self-direction and responsibility for their own work coupled with the lack of strict teacher-direction and control, a few students did not consider these features suitable for studying at school. Nonetheless, a clear majority of the students liked the course. Many students also saw it beneficial for their learning; yet, there were quite a few students who doubted the efficiency of learning English during the course. In consequence, the outcomes of our portfolio programme proved quite consistent with the results of other foreign language portfolio experiments as well as with the results of many portfolio experiments in other subjects.

In order to study portfolios as a vehicle for students' empowerment more thoroughly, all the approximately 100 portfolios were analysed with the help of a four-field map. The dimensions of the map were the students' learner empowerment and their positive or negative affective and volitional experiences. Nearly 80 percent of all the participants were considered to have had positive affective and volitional experiences as well as high learner empowerment. However, it would be a statistical illusion to claim that the portfolio programme *increased or improved* the empowerment of all those 79 students. First of all, since the course was only approximately seven weeks long, no fundamental changes in the students' learner empowerment or in their disposition towards school work or English studies could have happened in such a short time. Nonetheless, in the modularized upper secondary school system, the courses tend to be only six to eight weeks long. Secondly, since no systematic data were gathered about their learner empowerment – or about their self-direction and study motivation, for instance – prior to the portfolio programme, it cannot be claimed that the portfolio approach would have significantly increased or improved these qualities. Therefore, the main research question of whether the portfolio approach could *foster* the students' empowerment is semantically somewhat problematic. However, I would claim that for most of these 79 students, the portfolio approach *offered a chance to develop* their empowerment. For some, it offered a chance to make active use of both their English skills and their learning skills; for some, it may have given an opportunity to test and develop their skills. Most importantly, the portfolio programme offered the students a chance to tailor their learning tasks to match their learning skills, needs, goals and interests.

One such group of students who took the chance to tailor their studies in an empowered way were named the Greatest Gainers. Quite a few students in this group had rather low English proficiency. Because of their weaker English skills, they could have been anticipated to regard a course like this as difficult, too demanding and stressful. On the contrary, many of these students considered the course very liberating, motivating and empowering: the chance to define their own learning goals and tasks also offered them a chance to succeed. For some, the portfolio course was the first time in a long while when they noticed that they could use and learn English.

Unfortunately, it is usually likely that students with relatively poor success in foreign languages get deteriorating grades as they proceed through their language studies in the upper secondary school. They, undoubtedly, learn new things and strengthen their earlier skills but as they are not able to progress at the intended pace, their grades do not show the improvement of their skills, but only their decline when compared to other students or requirements. A genuine interest in the language and a wish to learn it may still exist but it may also sink deep: with constantly declining grades and probably rare feelings of achievement and success, foreign language learning may become a discouraging toil. Moreover, the students who do not perform very well academically but who behave rather well are often somehow neglected in the classroom. As many studies have shown, good students survive and succeed well no matter what kind of innovations are introduced, and overtly rebellious or problematic students get a great deal of attention, but low-success students who try and who do not overtly rebel or drop out are often left to struggle on their own. From that perspective, I consider the Greatest Gainers also the greatest achievement of this portfolio programme: the portfolio approach managed to offer new opportunities for such students who usually are either forgotten or overshadowed.

The portfolio approach offered a chance to set suitable goals and tasks also for students with very good English proficiency if they were willing to take the challenge. Some students set their goals very high aiming at perfection. That naturally caused some distress, but it also allowed these Perfectionists to extend and expand their skills in a way that they saw fitting. Once again, both for the Perfectionists, Excellent Work and other students with high learner empowerment and positive experiences, the most rewarding feature seemed to be the chance to set goals and tasks which the students considered beneficial and suitable for their own learning. Sometimes this chance even resulted in feelings of flow.

However, there were two or three hardworking and diligent female students who, because of their total distrust in their skills, were overwhelmed by the portfolio approach and its self-direction. As a result, the portfolio programme seemed to disempower them in the sense of both decreasing their trust in their learning skills and in their English skills.

In addition, there were circa ten male students who disliked the portfolio approach and, thus, more or less rejected it. In consequence, the portfolio approach could not foster their empowerment. While in some of these cases the portfolio approach may have decreased their learner empowerment, it did not seem to affect their lingual empowerment. Thus, albeit clearly a disliked and not an empowering experience for these students, the portfolio programme did not seem to be a severely disempowering experience for them either.

Interestingly, all the students who were considered to have low learner empowerment in this study, namely the Easy Living students and the Opponents, were male. Were the participating boys generally less diligent and less motivated in school work than the participating girls? Is this the case in general? Or, were the results somehow flawed or biased? Perhaps, as we teachers were all women, we recognized the girls' effort more easily than the boys' effort. Could the result have been caused by a different emphasis in the boys' and the girls' work and in the way they reported about it? Perhaps some boys appreciated the result only, not the process. For instance, some boys wanted to ignore the process and amount of work and only concentrate on the finished product. Furthermore, while most girls underlined the process and the effort, some boys regarded minimal effort as a criterion of quality and efficiency: the best possible outcome with the least possible effort. Perhaps some boys also considered it less face-threatening to attribute their possible low success to not even trying than to attribute it to the lack of their success despite effort. The girls, on the other hand, may have considered the process as important as the product. Maybe the girls had also internalized the criterion of effort better. Thus, by telling how much they had tried, they safeguarded the result in case the product was not as good as desired.

In addition to the possible bias in the analysis of learner empowerment, the present study has its limitations. Firstly, its closeness to real-life and to the people involved may have flawed the objectivity of the study. Although in the role of a researcher, I could not – and I did not want to – distance myself from the teacher's role. Furthermore, the teachers were my friends and former colleagues and some of the students were my former students. Yet, since I did not teach myself, I did not quite know what it felt like to participate in the portfolio programme as a teacher. Hence, my role may have been rather ambiguous.

The mixed role was not entirely a problem. The objectivity of a researcher is, of course, an important factor but qualitative, involved methodology has also its place and its need in the field of educational research. In an illuminative evaluation and also in action research, the researcher has to be in the centre of events to know what is happening in the innovation, what kinds of problems are encountered, how they are solved and, most importantly, what it feels like to be part of that innovation. Hence, in my opinion, the closeness to the teachers and to many of the students brought trust and openness to the study. All the teachers welcomed me to participate in the portfolio courses in their classrooms as often as I wanted and could. Thus, I could gain invaluable insight into the classroom reality. Furthermore, since the pilot group and one of the four actual portfolio groups were my former students and I participated in all their portfolio lessons, I could, to some extent, experience the process from the teacher's point of view. However, not teaching myself and thus not being influenced by my own teaching group's experiences, I could perhaps more clearly see and hear the varied experiences and reactions to the portfolio approach in the four different portfolio classrooms and thus see the totality of the portfolio programme.

Consequently, I would claim that although I was not perhaps totally objective because of my subjective experiences and interpretations of various things, I was trustworthy in telling as openly and honestly as I possibly could what happened in the portfolio programme. In the analysis of the portfolios, the fact that I had seen the process made the data more comprehensible and more accessible. Furthermore, knowing many of the students personally also provided opportunities for different encounters. The teacher's background gave me invaluable insight into the teaching practice with its multitude of various constraints but also opportunities.

Another limitation of the study was the difficulty of locating some students in the portfolio profile subgroups. In most cases, the students locations were clear but sometimes a case could have fitted into two or even three subgroups. The difficulty may be due to the analysis of data as well as the instrument of the analysis. Since the instrument of analysis – the four-field map – was designed particularly for the present study, it had not been previously used or tested by other researchers. Therefore, designing the analysis tool myself, I admittedly took a risk that might have – or may have – affected the credibility of the present study. However, the fact that the instrument as well as the method of the analysis were particularly designed for this study can also mean that they best met the requirements and research interests of this particular study.

The usage of the students' earlier grades as a background criterion when grouping the students into subgroups can also be criticized. However, as other background data, such as information about the students' self-direction or learning skills and strategies, were not available, their earlier English grades were taken into account as indicators of their prior success in English and, at least to some extent, as indicators of their English proficiency. As some studies had suggested that students' language proficiency might be a significant factor in their preparedness and willingness to assume an active and responsible learner role and, thus, also in the suitability of the portfolio approach for their studies, the prior grade was evaluated to impart useful information. Moreover, often being the ultimate outcome and perhaps even the only reward students get of their work, grades are part of everyday work and reality in a school context. Thus, although the assessment criteria of this course were significantly different, the students themselves probably compared the grades obtained in the portfolio course with their earlier grades in order to evaluate the eventual quality and success of their work.

Nevertheless, despite the problems of the portfolio process as well as the limitations of this study, the portfolio programme proved to give the students an opportunity to develop both their learner empowerment and their lingual empowerment. And I dare say that many students – through personal effort, will and involvement – also enhanced their empowerment.

Although our portfolio approach thus proved very beneficial in individualizing learning and in fostering students' empowerment, it also raised some serious concerns on a more general level. The individualization of learning, which is nowadays highly promoted by educators, is often considered to require individualized assessment. Portfolios seem to offer a vehicle for this as well. Yet, are highly individualized portfolios comparable enough as assessment tools? Are they valid and reliable for assessment purposes? In our programme, the portfolios were very personal and different and, yet, they were used as the assessment tool for one and the same course (EA6). And they all resulted in a grade. As discussed many times in this study, the teachers considered the grading of the portfolios difficult. First of all, how to compare the very different pieces of work? Moreover, how to balance the different criteria, such as effort, responsibility, involvement and content with language proficiency? As the grade of this course later on formed a part of the student's final English grade on his or her school leaving certificate, could it be based on such different criteria? In other words, if a student whose prior grades had been poor got a very good grade from this course because of his or her true involvement and effort, was that grade valid as a grade of *English*? Moreover, could such a grade give the student a false impression of his or her proficiency and thus result in a later disappointment in the matriculation examination, for instance? Furthermore, are portfolios reliable as tools for assessment? If the portfolios had been graded by many evaluators, would their grades have been consistent with each other?

Admittedly, in our portfolio programme the grades were not completely comparable with the students' English proficiency levels. However, since willingness and readiness to use language were considered to be a vital part of lingual empowerment, our main objective was to encourage the students to use their skills of English actively. Thus, effort and active use of the language had to be rewarded also in terms of the grade. Furthermore, any language competence, however perfect in its grammatical accuracy or choice of vocabulary, is of little relevance if the learner lacks the volition or courage to put his or her competence in active use. In contrast, the willingness and courage to use a foreign language actively can often compensate for many linguistic shortcomings in real life communication situations. In consequence, albeit not necessary consistent with the students' earlier grades or with their 'language proficiency', the grades were consistent with the objectives and criteria of this particular course. As active use of language is also encouraged in the *Framework curriculum for senior secondary school* (1994), the assessment criteria were in line with the national objectives for foreign language education.

Because the portfolios were graded by one teacher only, the reliability of the portfolio assessment could not be tested in our experiment. To ensure the trustworthiness of the assessment procedure, we considered it important that the teacher who saw the portfolio process also assessed the portfolio products: an evaluator not familiar with the working process could not necessarily have seen all the aspects of the students' effort, involvement and responsibility, which all were central criteria. Nonetheless, it would have been interesting to test the inter-rater reliability by having the portfolios graded by us all four participant teachers, or by an outside evaluator. Furthermore, it could have been interesting to compare the portfolio outcomes to the students' other learning outcomes, for instance their matriculation examination results.

As said above, it was considered important that the portfolio rater was familiar with the portfolio process. Another feature that was considered important in our experiment was that the teachers knew their portfolio students, their skills of English and probably also their learning skills and habits fairly well since they had taught these students for at least a year or two. In addition to perhaps helping the assessment procedure by allowing deeper insight into the students' individual portfolio processes, good knowledge of one's students probably also helped in guiding and scaffolding the students' individual processes. Furthermore, the students also knew their teacher better, which may have helped to build trust and the feeling of being fairly equal participants in this programme: the feeling and atmosphere of trust and partnership are crucial for carrying out both an innovation and an action research project such as the present study.

Yet, in spite of good student knowledge, the individual processes of support, guidance and monitoring were experienced difficult to carry out. Consequently, guiding students whom one does not know at all might cause a great deal of various problems and difficulties. This, however, may be the case in bigger nongraded upper secondary schools with many teachers of English, for instance, where the teachers may change from one course to another. Could teachers working in such circumstances use portfolios in their teaching? Generally speaking, how can teachers individualize teaching and learning in any way if they do not know their students, their needs, interests, goals and skills?

According to my recent experiences with two groups in the Teacher Training School in 1997, the portfolio approach may also work in the nongraded system and with students whom the teacher does not know very well. However, the problems of supporting, scaffolding and monitoring the individual processes as well as the difficulties of assessing the portfolios may be heightened if the teacher does not know the students well. Thus, the portfolio approach in such circumstances may require a great deal of extra work and care from the teacher. It may also require even more self-direction and responsibility from the students as the teacher cannot monitor all their portfolio processes as personally and individually as perhaps desirable.

The final assessment of the portfolios may also raise additional concerns: if the teacher does not know the students very well, it may be more difficult to see and to recognize the effort and responsibility. Some students may not be inclined to tell much about their working processes and amount of work, for instance, and if not knowing the students' 'styles', their earlier performance as well as their English proficiency levels, it may be difficult to see the possible improvement. In other words, if the teacher sees the products only, a portfolio produced with extra care and effort by a student whose English skills are relatively poor may look like a portfolio produced by an average student with no additional effort and involvement, for example. It may also be more difficult to judge the authenticity of the portfolio work. For instance, if the pieces are exquisite and in perfect and eloquent English, are these qualities hallmarks of the student's true involvement and superb knowledge of English or telltale signs of plagiarism? These questions are highly ethical and also strongly tied to the idea of empowerment: fostering empowerment requires not only opportunities and resources but volition and, moreover, mutual trust. Hence, if it is not possible to monitor the working process so closely that the teacher could be certain of the student's effort and involvement as well as of the authenticity of his or her work, I feel that the risk of being fooled by an odd plagiarist is a lesser evil than suspecting genuinely engaged and hardworking students and thus disempowering them with suspicions and mistrust.

However, portfolios may also offer a good alternative tool for passing courses outside classroom tuition in nongraded schools. Instead of taking a test to pass the course, a student can compile a portfolio concerning the course and its contents. Although the problems of monitoring and assessing the work are still the same as discussed above, the portfolios most likely tell more of the students' work than a single test – and the production of the portfolio most likely also teaches the students more. The use of portfolios and its different features and adaptations in nongraded school could offer many interesting issues worth further experimentation and study.

Nevertheless, portfolios do not provide a panacea for learning, studying or assessment. However, they provide opportunities. They may give the students a chance to set their own goals, tasks and time-tables according to their personal interests, needs and skills. They may also offer the students various opportunities to show their working, learning and skills, and an opportunity to be assessed on the basis of a combination of different criteria, not only on the basis of the success of the outcomes. In consequence, the portfolios may provide a vehicle for the students' empowerment. However, portfolios do not generate or engender empowerment automatically: the process of empowerment requires getting enough decision-making power and enough resources but, most importantly, becoming empowered appears to require a personal will and belief that empowerment is not only possible but also desirable.

Portfolios may also provide a vehicle for teachers' empowerment. For instance, they may give the teachers a chance to get to know their students better, to see their goals, interests, ideas as well as their skills and needs more comprehensively. Furthermore, they may offer valuable insight not only into the students' learning but also into the teacher's own work and its emphases, strenghts and areas for improvement. Thus, they may open new opportunities and interests in teaching and in teacher research, for instance. In sum, to adapt Takala's (1997, 7) words quoted earlier in this study, it seems obvious that, if properly used, portfolios are a promising tool to be added to any teacher's methodological toolbox as a tool for learning and assessment, and also as a tool for developing the teacher's own work. However, to be a truly empowering experience, the use of portfolios may require a great deal of time, work, commitment and also tolerance of ambiguity and frustration from the teacher, as well as from the students.

Finally, as empowering as the portfolio programme could be considered on the basis of our portfolio data, one should bear in mind that, at the end of the day, the portfolio programme was just another course of English. By most students, the portfolio course was considered to be sometimes distressing and demanding but also a refreshing, rewarding and, in total, quite empowering experience; however, to quote a student's post-epilogue, "it was not a mind-blowing experience" for the majority of the students. Yet, it may have been a mind-blowing experience to a few students, at least to the two cases of constant flow and some of the Greatest Gainers. And, seeing all the effort, creativity, enthusiasm and individuality that the total of the portfolios exhibited, it certainly was a mind-blowing experience to me.

> *My works tell a lot of me and my interests. Something about my thoughts and opinions. Probably they show that my English is not perfect, but I've tried my best and I'm developing all the time.*

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Appendix 1.

# PORTFOLIO LUKION ENGLANNIN OPETUKSESSA

**Pirjo Pollari/KTL**
**Päivi Ahlroos/Kesy**
**Mervi Eloranta ja Pirjo Väänänen/Normaalikoulu**

## Mikä on portfolio?

Hakiessaan töitä taiteilija esittelee töidensä valikoimaa, portfoliotaan. Työvalikoimansa avulla hän osoittaa työnantajalle mitä hän osaa, mitä hän on tehnyt ja mistä hän on kiinnostunut – eli minkälainen hän on taiteilijana.

Monet koulut, varsinkin taideaineiden oppilaitokset, käyttävät portfoliota sekä valitessaan opiskelijoita että arvioidessaan heidän kehitystään ja saavutuksiaan. Myös tavalliset koulut voivat käyttää portfolioarviointia sekä opiskelu- että arviointimenetelmänä.

Koulussa portfolio on kokoelma oppilastöitä, joiden oppilas arvioi olevan hänen parhaita töitään tai muuten hänelle tärkeitä työnäytteitä. Se voi olla **työsalkku**, johon oppilas sijoittaa kaikki työnsä, myös töiden eri versiot ja keskeneräisetkin työt. Tai se voi olla valmiiden, oppilaan itsensä arvioimien ja valikoimien töiden kokoelma, **näytesalkku**, kuten ylläolevassa taiteilijan tapauksessa. Koulussa portfolio on yleensä kuitenkin molempia: ensin työsalkku ja myöhemmin, esim. kurssin päätteeksi työsalkusta valikoitujen töiden näytesalkku, joka sisältää myös töiden esittelyä, valinnan perusteita sekä itsearviointia.

## Portfoliokokeilu lukion englannin kielen opetuksessa

Keväällä 1994 käynnistyy Jyväskylän normaalikoulussa ja Kesyn lukiossa opetuskokeilututkimus portfoliosovellutuksesta lukion englannin kielen opetuksessa. Opetuskokeilun kohteena on vieraiden kielten ns. **kulttuurikurssi**, jonka tavoitteena ja sisältönä on **oppilaiden mahdollisimman omaehtoinen tutustuminen mm. taiteisiin, kirjallisuuteen, musiikkiin, elokuvaan ja teatteriin.**

Edellä mainituista aihepiireistä **oppilaat itse** voivat omien mieltymystensä ja kykyjensä mukaan **valita töidensä aiheet.** Samoin oppilaat itse voivat valita **töidensä toteutustavat**, kuitenkin siten, että niissä ilmenee sekä **suullista että kirjallista työskentelyä.** Työt voivat olla sekä yksilötöitä että pari- ja ryhmätöitä.

Työnsä oppilas kokoaa ensin työsalkkuunsa, josta hän kurssin lopulla valitsee näytesalkkuunsa omat **näytetyönsä** (3 kpl), jotka hän myös itse arvioi. Näytetöiden ja niiden valintaperusteluiden ja arviointien lisäksi oppilaan **työpäiväkirja** on osana näyteportfoliota. Näytesalkkuun oppilas liittää lisäksi **portfolionsa esittelyn** sekä **loppuarvion** koko portfolioprosessista.

**Kielitaidon osa-alueet:**

Lukeminen
Kirjoittaminen
Kuunteleminen
Puhuminen

**Aihepiirit:**

Kirjallisuus
Teatteri
Elokuva
TV
Musiikki
Taiteet
Taide- ja kirj.historia

**Mahdollisia työmuotoja:**

Esitelmä
Arvostelu
Tiivistelmä
Henkilökuva
Raportti
Haastattelu
Juliste
Seinälehti
Mielipiteitä
Luova tuotos, jne.

**Portfoliokurssin suoritusvaatimukset ovat:**

1. Vähintään viisi työtä eri aihealueilta (työsalkku)
2. Kaikkia kielitaidon osa-alueita on käytettävä
   - tämän toteutus voi ilmentyä esim. työpäiväkirjassa
3. Hyväksytty näyteportfolio
4. Aktiivinen osallistuminen yhteistunneille

**Näyteportfolion tulee sisältää:**

1. Näyteportfolion esittely eli prologi
2. Kolme näytetyötä, joihin kuhunkin liittyy myös valintaperusteita ja itsearviota sisältävä kansilehti tai loppukommentti. Valituista kolmesta oppilas valitsee vielä yhden, joka on hänen mielestänsä joko hänen paras tai tärkein työnsä ja perustelee valinnan.
3. Työpäiväkirja
4. Portfoliokurssin loppuarviointi eli epilogi

**Millainen on hyvä näyteportfolio?**

Työt ovat **monipuolisia sekä aiheiltaan että toteutukseltaan** (työmuoto, media jne). Kirjallisten töiden lisäksi työmuotoja voivat olla esim. suullinen esitelmä, äänite tai video. **Eri kielitaidon osa-alueita** on myös käytetty monipuolisesti. Työt ovat **sisällöltään hyviä**, mielenkiintoisia ja selkeitä. **Asiaan paneutuminen ja harrastuneisuus** samoin kuin **vastuu omasta työstä** ovat olennaisia kriteereitä. Työt ovat **kielellisesti selkeitä ja sujuvia**; kielellinen virheettömyys ei kuitenkaan ole kaikkein tärkein tai ainoa kriteeri. Töiden **ulkoasu on siisti. Luovuus ja kyky analysoida**, esim. vertailla englanninkielistä kulttuuria suomalaiseen, on suotavaa. **Arviointiin ja esittelyyn** on myös paneuduttu ansiokkaasti.

## Appendix 2.

KURSSI 6 : ENGLANNINKIELINEN KULTTUURI -PORTFOLIOKOKEILU
AIKATAULUSUUNNITELMA
2A/2B

---

VK 16
Ma 18.4. } JOHDANTO +
Ti 19.4. } TYÖSUUNNITELMA
Ke 20.4.
To 21.4. (STUDIO)
Pe 22.4.

VK17 Ma 25.4. 2B: KIELIOPPI
Ti 26.4. Class Conference
Ke 27.4. 2A: KIELIOPPI
To 28.4. (STUDIO)
Pe 29.4.

VK18 Ma 2.5.
Ti 3.5. Class Conference
Ke 4.5.
To 5.5. YHTEINEN KUUNTELU
Pe 6.5.

VK19 Ma 9.5.
Ti 10.5. Class Conference
Ke 11.5.
To 12.5. } HELATORSTAI
Pe 13.5. }

VK20 Ma 16.5.
Ti 17.5. Class Conference
Ke 18.5.
To 19.5. STUDIO
Pe 20.5.

VK21 Ma 23.5.
Ti 24.5. }
Ke 25.5. }
To 26.5. } KOEVIIKKO
Pe 27.5. }

VK22 Ma 30.5. }
Ti 31.5. }
Ke 1.6
To 2.6.
Pe 3.6

KULTTUURIKURSSIN (KURSSI 6) PÄÄTAVOITE:

Mahdollisimman omaehtoinen tutustuminen englanninkieliseen kulttuuriin eli kirjallisuuteen, teatteriin, elokuvaan, televisioon, musiikkiin, kuvataiteeseen, taide ja kirjallisuushistoriaan.

AJATUKSIA PORTFOLIOSTA TYÖTAPANA

- opettaja ei valitse opiskelutapoja, oppimismenetelmiä, eikä tarkkoja oppimissisältöjä (aiheita), vaan oppilas itse
- oppilaan vapaus kasvaa ja samalla vastuu omasta oppimisestaan
- itseohjautuvuus
- tavoitteet voi valita oman kiinnostuksen ja kykyjen mukaan
- mitä enemmän panostat aikaa ja vaivaa, sitä enemmän kehität kielitaitoasi ja kulttuurintuntemustasi

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Appendix 3.

## PORTFOLION ESITTELY- JA ARVIOINTIKIRJOITUSTEN OHJEITA

Valmiiseen näyteportfolioosi Sinun tulee liittää myös töidesi ja opiskelusi esittelyä, arviointia ja arviointien perusteluja.

### 1. PROLOGI

**Esittele portfoliosi** ENGLANNIKSI. Esittele esimerkiksi
- itsesi englannin opiskelijana ja kulttuurin harrastajana
- portfoliotyösi sekä perustele lyhyesti valintasi, esimerkiksi:
  - Miksi valitsin juuri nämä työt?
  - Mikä niistä oli mielestäni paras/tärkein/mieleisin? Miksi?
  - Miten niitä olisi vielä voinut parantaa?
  - Mikä niistä oli hankalin/vaikein? Miksi?
  - Mitä toivoisin töitteni kertovan minusta?
  - Millaisin perustein toivoisin töitäni arvioitavan?

### 2. VALITUT TYÖT (suomeksi tai englanniksi)

**Arvioi jokainen valittu työsi (3 kpl) sekä perustele, miksi valitsit juuri tämän työn.**
Apuna voit käyttää mm. seuraavia kysymyksiä:

- Miksi valitsin juuri tämän työn?
- Mikä siinä on parasta/tärkeintä/mielenkiintoisinta tms?
- Miten se mahdollisesti poikkeaa muista töistäni?
- Mikä siinä oli vaikeinta?
- Miten paneuduin ja panostin tähän työhön ja/tai sen eri työvaiheisiin? Miten se näkyy työn lopputuloksessa?
- Mitä opin muiden palautteesta? Kuinka se vaikutti työhöni?
- Miten työtä olisi voinut vielä parantaa?
- Mitä olen oppinut tästä työstä ja sen tekemisestä?
- Mitä uusia opiskelu- tms. ideoita työ mahdollisesti herätti?

**HUOM ! Muista valita töistäsi oma suosikkisi**: työ, joka on Sinun mielestäsi paras, tärkein, mielenkiintoisin tai muuten Sinulle mieluisin työ sekä perustele tämä valintasi!

## 3. EPILOGI

**Koko portfolioprojektin arviointi** suomeksi tai englanniksi:
Mitä tämä kurssi sinulle "antoi"?
Mistä pidit, mistä et?

Voit käyttää apunasi mm. seuraavia kysymyksiä:

- Mitä olen oppinut töistäni?
- Mitkä työtavat ja aiheet olivat minulle mieleisimmät? Miksi?
- Mitkä työtavat ja aiheet olivat vaikeimmat? Miksi?
- Kuinka muut oppilaat ja opettaja(t) tukivat työtäni?
  Millaista tukea toivoisin jatkossa?
- Mitä opin muilta?
- Millaisia ongelmia ilmeni opiskelussani? Kuinka ratkaisin ne?
- Jos nyt aloittaisin tämän portfolioprojektin, mitä tekisin toisin?
  Miksi?
  Mitä tekisin samoin? Miksi?
- Miten minun tulisi kehittää opiskeluani?
- Mitä haluaisin seuraavaksi tehdä/ oppia?
- Millaiset työtavat ja aiheet minua kiinnostaisivat eniten jatkossa?
  Mitkä eivät? Miksi?
- Mitä asioita pidän englannin opiskelussa tärkeänä? Miksi?

Appendix 4.

# PORTFOLIOKURSSIN ARVIOINTI

OPPILAAN NIMI ____________________ KURSSINUMERO_____

YHTEISTUNNEILLE OSALLISTUMINEN:

CLASS-CONFERENCE TUNNIT
* OSALLISTUMINEN
* AKTIIVISUUS

VASTUUNOTTO TYÖSTÄ:

TYÖSALKUN LAATU (KAIKKI TYÖT):

PROLOGI, EPILOGI, ARVIOT:

TYÖPÄIVÄKIRJA:

NÄYTETÖIDEN LAATU:

## EXAMPLES OF THE ANALYSIS RESULTING IN THE LOCATION OF ALL THE PORTFOLIO CASES ON THE MAP

As explained in Chapter 1 in Part III, the students' portfolios were the primary source of data for the analysis resulting in the location of all the portfolio cases on the map. Additional data, for instance the teacher's assessments and my observations, were then used to challenge or corroborate the findings based on the portfolio. The first example of the analysis is such a case: the portfolio provided ample data yielding rich and 'clear' information, which was also undoubtedly supported by additional information from the other sources of data.

However, the analysis was not always that simple or clear. Sometimes the portfolio provided very little data at all or little or contradictory data concerning either one of the dimensions of the analysis. In such cases, other sources of data were needed to get enough information for the analysis. In most such cases, the secondary sources of data provided information concerning the dimension in question. Examples 2 and 3 illustrate such cases of analysis. However, if the secondary sources of data did not provide enough information either, the case was left unclassified.

The main concern of the analysis was to locate each portfolio case in one of the four areas of the map. However, as the area of high learner empowerment and positive affective and volitional experiences accommodated over 80 cases, these cases were divided into smaller subgroups based on the criteria emerging from the data. Examples 1 and 2 also illustrate that procedure.

**Example 1.**

High learner empowerment and positive affective and volitional experiences (015F)

According to her portfolio, at the beginning of the course the student had been rather worried about whether she would have enough time and energy to produce the portfolio because her hobby took a great deal of her time outside school. However, through careful time-management as well as growing inspiration towards her work the student succeeded very well in taking charge of her work: in her epilogue the student wrote that she was happy, and also slightly surprised, with her own diligence, self-discipline and engagement. Her working log with its numerous, detailed entries also gave ample evidence of a highly learner empowered working process. Furthermore, the pieces of work were many-sided, some very extensive and also rather polished - in other words, they had clearly taken a great deal of time, effort and deliberation. In addition to the data provided by the student's portfolio, both the teacher's assessments and my observations during the course completely corroborated the student's own assessment of her responsibility and diligence. In sum, all the data yielded information on the student's very high learner empowerment.

The student's affective and volitional experiences also seemed clearly positive. Apart from occasional worries about time or topic constraints, the student seemed to enjoy her work. Moreover, she stated many times in her portfolio that she really liked the portfolio course. Her enthusiasm and motivation were clearly expressed also in class conferences: according to both the teacher and myself, the student appeared to like the course very much.

In consequence, the student was situated in the area of high learner empowerment and positive affective and volitional experiences. Furthermore, having improved her English grade from 7 to 10 and having clearly expressed that she had gained positive learning experiences as well as positive learning outcomes, the student was considered one of the Greatest Gainers in the more detailed analysis of this area.

**Example 2.**

High learner empowerment and positive affective and volitional experiences (027F)

On the basis of the student's portfolio her learner empowerment was clearly high. The pieces of work were excellent, demanding and some also very extensive. According to her log entries, she had worked on numerous days and used English a lot during the course: in addition to the actual, finished portfolio pieces the student had also read one or two additional books in English. Also, according to the student's own comments in her portfolio, she had invested a great amount of effort, work and time in her work. For instance, she commented on two of her selected pieces as follows: "I'm especially proud of the last two; the amount of work I put in them is humongous". The teacher also evaluated the student and her working process very motivated, responsible and self-directed - in other words, very learner empowered.

The student's affective and volitional experiences were more difficult to discern. While the student wrote that she enjoyed doing something different for a change, she also expressed some very critical, even negative, remarks: in her epilogue she listed three "plusses" and six "minuses" of the portfolio approach. Thus, on the basis of her portfolio it was very difficult to decide whether her experiences had been mainly positive or negative. Fortunately, the student was interviewed at the end of the portfolio course. In the interview the student said that although the portfolio course still needed many improvements, she had mostly liked the course and had preferred it to an 'ordinary', more textbook-driven course.

Consequently, the student was situated in the area of high learner empowerment and positive affective and volitional experiences although her feelings and experiences were not strongly or unanimously positive. Furthermore, since the student's work was exquisite and her English grades had always been 10, the student was situated in the subgroup of Excellent Work. Albeit the student had very high expectations towards her work and her working process was tinged with perfectionism at times, perfectionism was not as clearly and constantly present as it was in the case of the Perfectionists.

**Example 3.**

Low learner empowerment and negative affective and volitional experiences (107M)

The student's portfolio contained five pieces of work: two film reviews, two analyses of a song's lyrics and a poem. Thus, the pieces were not very many-sided or varied. They were also quite short: in both song analyses the student's own texts were less than 100 words long. In addition, the student's prologue, epilogue and self-assessments were rather brief. Moreover, on the basis of the eight short entries of his working log, the student did not appear to have invested much time or effort in his work. Furthermore, according to his teacher, the student had been absent from quite a few class conferences and other 'compulsory' lessons and, when present, had not been engaged or interested in the portfolio work. Thus, the teacher evaluated the student's motivation, responsibility and self-direction quite low. However, the student himself commented on his selected pieces as follows: "Paneuduin töihini hyvin, mutta pientä parantamisen varaa jäi" (I concentrated on the pieces well but there was also room for small improvements). Thus, the student himself seemed to be somewhat happy with his effort and engagement. Nevertheless, despite the student's own slightly justifying comments on his effort and engagement, the student's learner empowerment was considered low.

The student's affective and volitional experiences were undoubtedly negative. The student disliked the portfolio approach because, in his opinion, it demanded too much work. His whole epilogue reads as follows:

> *Portfoliotyöskentely oli minulle uusi kokemus, josta jäi enemmän negatiivisia kuin positiivisia ajatuksia. Positiivista oli se, että sanavarasto karttui ja oppi täydentämään englannin kieltään. Kaikki muu oli negatiivista. Minä en tykännyt tästä systeemistä yhtään. Tulee liian paljon töitä yhdellä kertaa. Muut voivat olla toista mieltä mutta tämä on minun mielipide. Olisi parempi jos opetettaisiin opettajajohtoisesti niin säästyisi paljon vaivaa.* (107M)
> Portfolio work was a new experience to me which left more negative than positive feelings. What was positive was that my vocabulary grew and I learnt to complement my English skills. All the rest was negative. I didn't like this system at all. Too much work all at once. The others may think otherwise but this is my opinion. It would be better if teaching was teacher-directed so it would save a lot of trouble.

In sum, the student was situated in the area of low learner empowerment and negative affective and volitional experiences.

# "This is my portfolio"

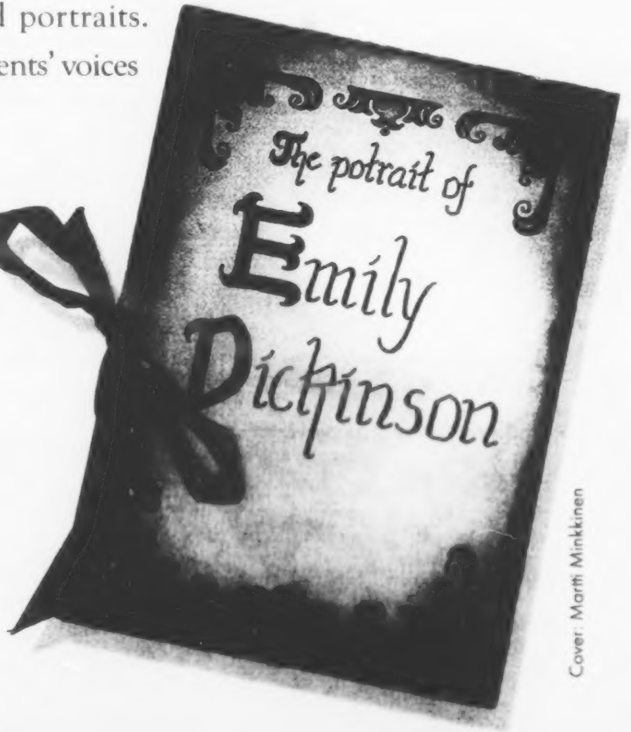
## Portfolios in upper secondary school English studies

- Could portfolios foster students' empowerment?
- How did the portfolio programme proceed?
- How did the students react to the portfolio approach?

This book describes a portfolio programme in the teaching of English in two Finnish upper secondary schools. Approximately 100 students and their three teachers participated in this portfolio programme, whose topic area was culture.

Written by a teacher-researcher, the report combines theory and classroom practice. Part I focusses on portfolios as a tool for learning and assessment in different fields of education but mainly in foreign language teaching. Part I also discusses the concept of empowerment.

Part II describes and evaluates the portfolio programme and its process in the classrooms in a detailed and pragmatic way and Part III illustrates and analyses different, authentic student portfolio profiles and portraits. Throughout Parts II and III the students' voices are heard in their own comments.



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